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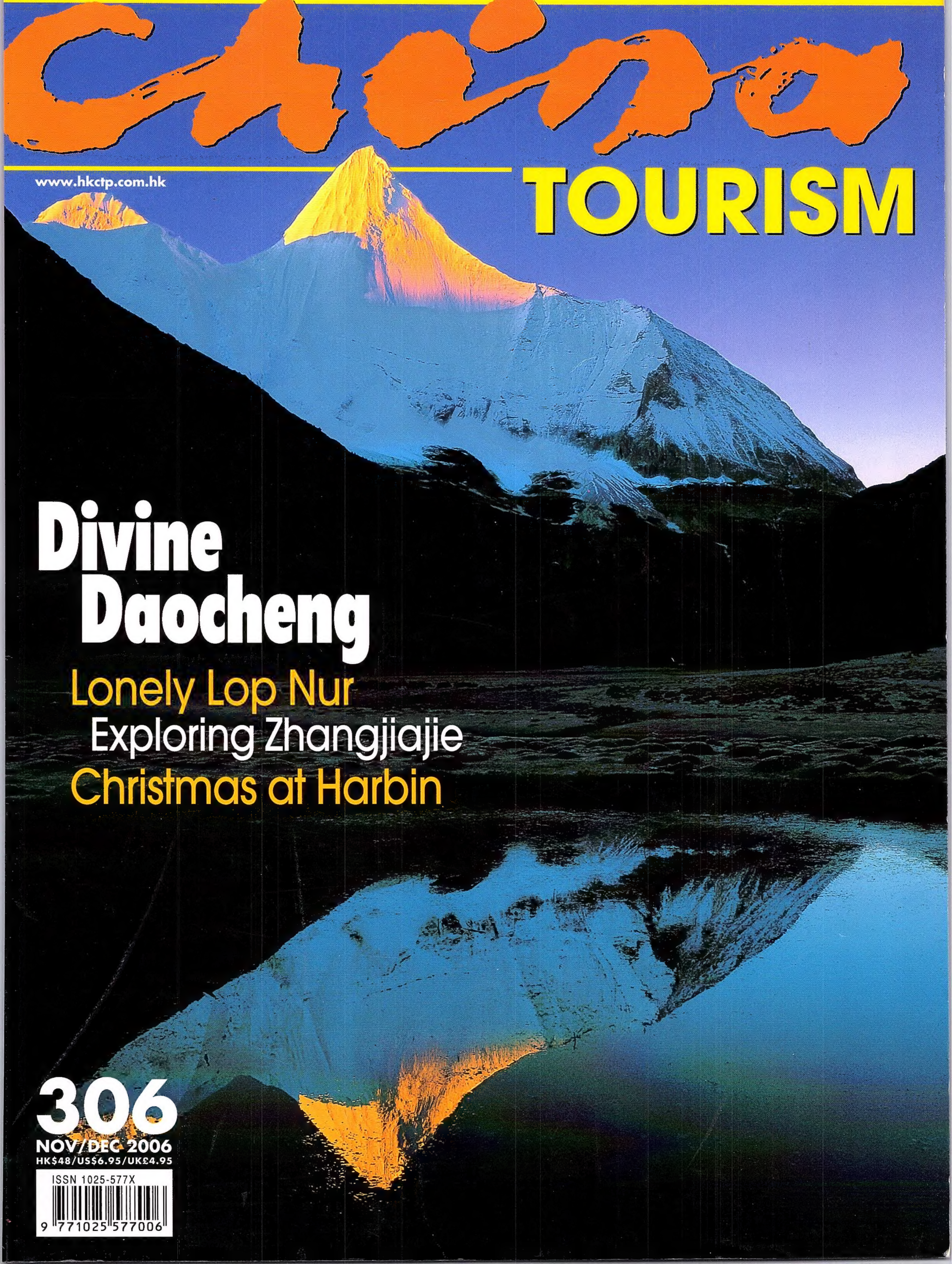

Divine Daocheng

Lonely Lop Nur

Exploring Zhangjiajie

Christmas at Harbin

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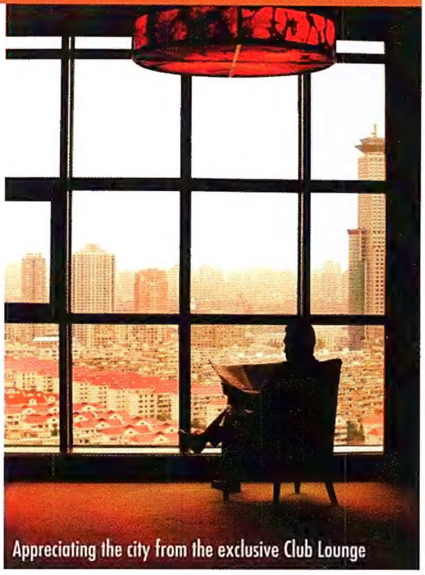
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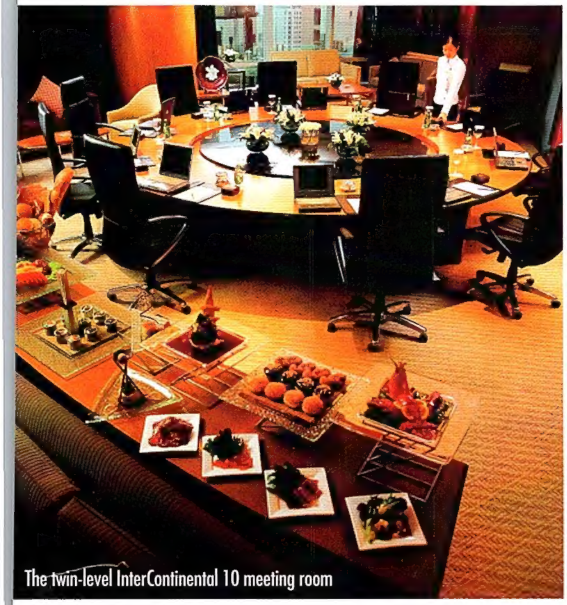
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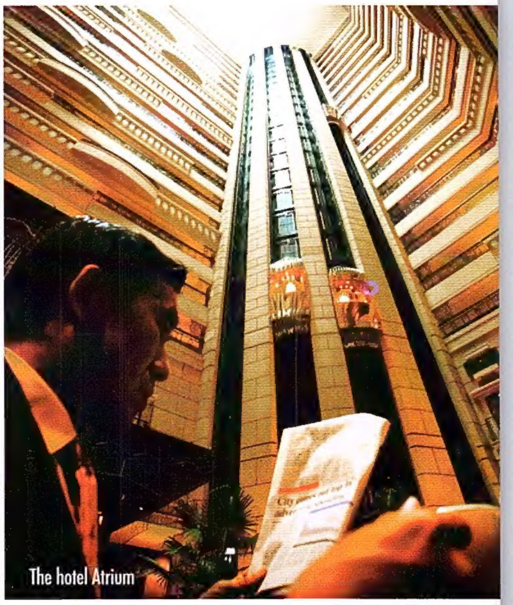
The hotel Atrium

Nov / Dec 2006

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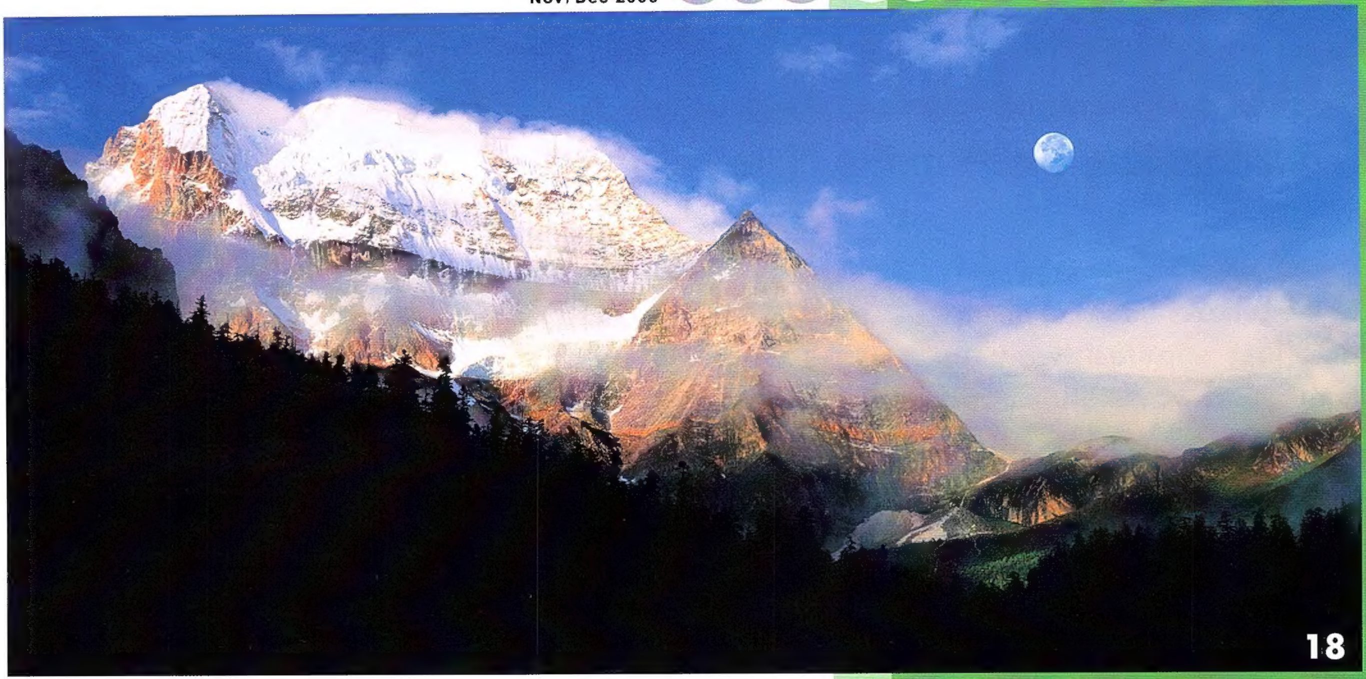
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Located in northwest Hunan Province, Zhangjiajie's more than 3,000 jagged mountains, deep, serene forests, and clear springs and streams create the effect of entering an oversized bonsai planting or a Chinese scroll painting. You can also take its best shots with photography tips from our reporters.

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**City of Fantasy and Joy —
Two Visits to Hengdian World Studios**

Photos & Article • Adam Wong

After a decade of hard work, the Hengdian World Studios, which boasts an asset of 3 billion yuan, has even been dubbed by The Hollywood Reporter as "the Chinese Hollywood".

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Luxury Tours to Lijiang & Shangri-La

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Originally an owner of a bar in Shenzhen, the author has given up her business, and been studying the Mosuo community on the border between Sichuan and Yunnan provinces for four years.

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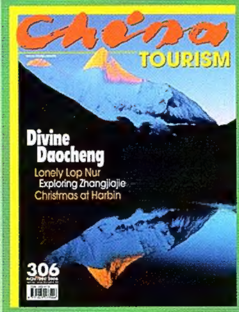

Cover: Mount Jambeyang at an elevation of 5,958 metres. (by Lu Linglong)

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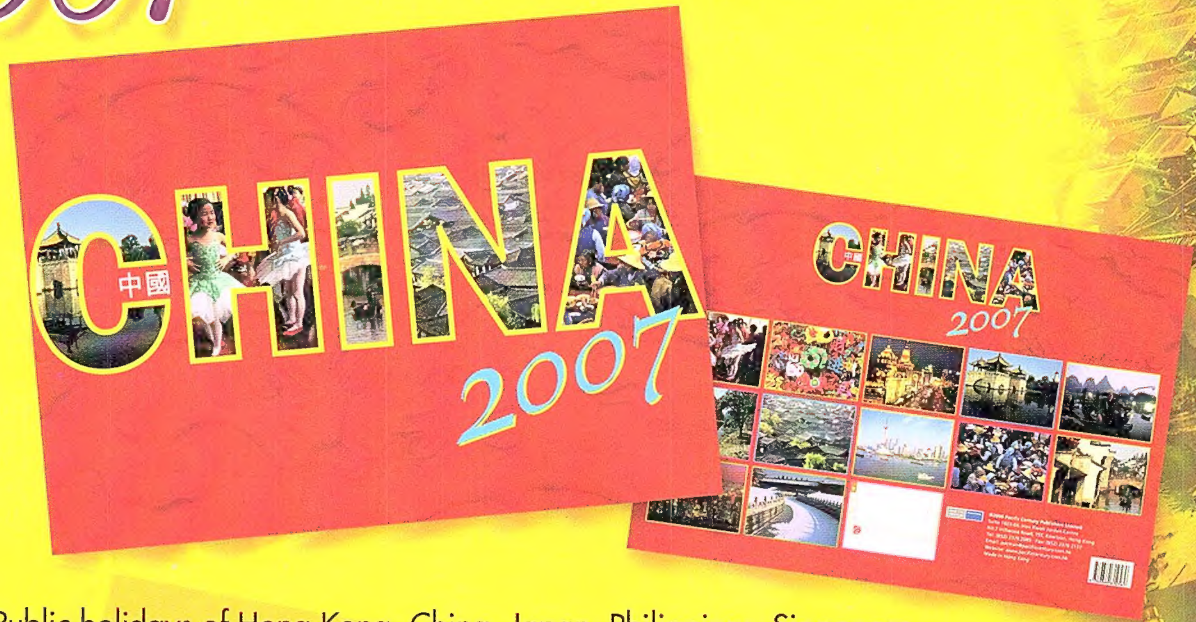

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B. Pig

C. Snake

Please submit your answer before Dec 30, 2006. *Three lucky stars* will be drawn on Dec 31, 2006, and will be contacted individually.

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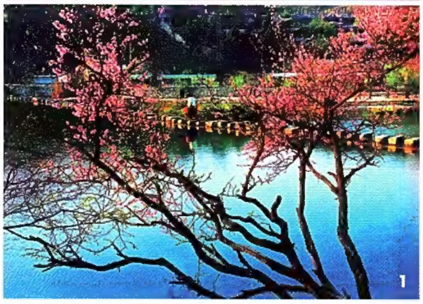
No.306 Nov/Dec 2006

Rural Scenery in Guizhou

Guizhou Province located in Southwest China is celebrated for its rich ethnic cultures and abundant natural resources. Let' s have a look on its rural scenic areas and plan a trip to Guizhou earlier.

Huaxi Scenic Area



Located 17 km south of Guiyang city, Huaxi (Flowery Stream) Park presents travellers with four characteristic hills along the Huaxi River. In the scenic area, there are beautiful peony, osmanthus flowers, peach blossoms, pines and cypress, water lily lakes, and artificial lakes, etc. Between the mountain ranges, there is a famous long bridge built above a grand waterfall.

Nanjiang Grand Canyon

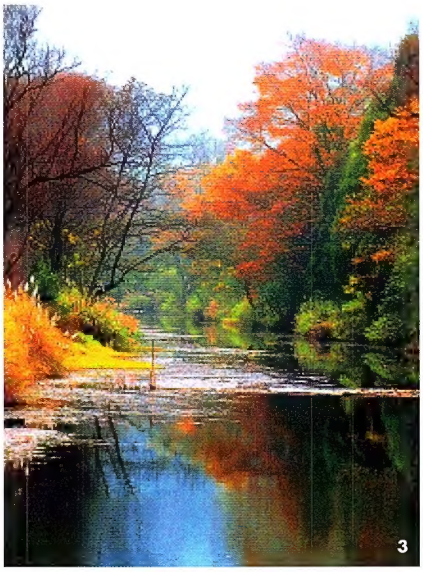
The canyon is located 54 km from Guiyang and 18 km from Kaiyang county seat — the hometown of the Shaoshang Buyei Miao. The centre part of the canyon spans over 40 km, with its deepest depth 320 metres. There is a rafting river of 14 km long. At tourist spot Ladder Rock (Tiziyan), 5.7 km in length, there grows the slender lady palm (*Rhapis humilis*) rarely found in China; at the Luoguchong scenic area, stalacites are seen everywhere along the both sides of the mountains. But the most attractive sight there is a series of 48 waterfalls.

Xianghuoyan Canyon

Located in the hometown of the Hefeng Buyei Miao, south of Kaiyang city, the Xianghuayan (Incense Rock) Canyon spans 12 km and covers an area of 35 square metres. Captivating waterfalls spread around the scenic area, with a vertical drop of water of 60-more metres. In one of the waterfalls, there is a hollowed rock resembling a Chinese incense shrine. Hence the canyon's name.

Xiaoheche Ecology Park

Xiaochehe (Small Cars River) was a seriously polluted industrial area in the past. Since its refurbishment in 2001, it has become a lovely ecology park which boasts 24,000 trees, a grassland of 2,450 square metres, and vegetation of 600 square metres. It also functions as an education base of environment protection.



Hundred-flower Lake

Located 22 km northwest of Guiyang city, the scenic area covers 83 sq km and features in karst topography, natural hills and waters. There are about 100 islands which divide the lake into the middle, southern, and northern parts - all offering unique scenery.

Travel Tips

Transport: There are flights from Hong Kong or Shenzhen to Guiyang, capital city of Guizhou. Trains also go between Guangzhou in Guangdong Province and Guizhou, but it is relatively time-consuming.

Accommodation: Guizhou Tianyi Haosheng Hotel ★★★★★
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Guiyang Baicheng Hotel ★★★★
Add: 246 Zhonghua Rd South, Guiyang
Guiyang Ruijin Hotel ★★★
Add: 62 Ruijin Rd South, Guiyang

1. Peach blossoms bloom at Huaxi Park in mid-spring.
2. Nanjiang Canyon spans 40-more km, with its deepest depth of 320 metres.
3. Previously an industrial district, Xiaochehe was refurbished in an ecology part in 2001.
4. Hundred-flower Lake is a wonderland of waters, hills, and islets.

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EXPECTATIONS En Route

What goals do you set for yourself before going on a journey? To appreciate gorgeous landscapes, make new friends from all walks of life, or take breathtaking pictures?

Whatever your intentions, there are always variables in life.

Even the most seasoned travellers have been known to make miscalculations, sometimes enough to change their plans completely. This happened to one of our editors on a visit to the divine land of Daocheng in Sichuan. A normally careful planner, she forgot to take enough Renminbi on her trip. By chance she met a young Frenchman who was also running low on funds. In equally dire straits, they decided to travel together. Along the way they grappled with altitude sickness, met friendly Tibetans, and most importantly, tackled their own emotional frustrations so that they could enjoy the moving scenery around them.

Perhaps the most important thing we can learn from this story is to expect the unexpected, or at least not let the unexpected spoil our experience — then we will always be sure to have a "perfect trip"!

(by Dianna Lau)

Nov **Anhui**

10th Huangshan Tourism Festival

During the festival, a series of activities will be held, including tours to Mount Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) and traditional cultural performances. Besides gorgeous scenes, tourists will enjoy traditional Chinese opera, folk-custom shows, lantern shows, Chinese Tea Festival and other enchanting activities.

Oct 31 ~ Nov 5 **Zhuhai, Guangdong**

6th Airshow China

The bi-yearly show will feature the display of real-size products, trade discussion, technological exchanges and flying display. It will also highlight the market prospects and cooperative opportunities in China for aviation and aerospace manufacturing industries, civil transport industry, etc. More than 23 countries and regions from around the world will participate into the show. Do reserve the hotel room in advance! Website: www.airshow.com.cn

Nov **Shanghai**

Shanghai International Arts Festival

Shanghai becomes the focus of arts lovers during the month-long festival hosted by the Ministry of Culture annually since 1999. The varied programme features more than 150 performances covering everything from symphony orchestras, dance, and opera to acrobatics, magic and drama. Allied events are an international piano competition, magic festival and contest, an Asia music festival and an arts and crafts fair.

Nov 16 ~ 19 **Macau**

53rd Macau Grand Prix

It is probably the most internationally known event produced in Macau, because of its quality and of its history of more than five decades. The Grand Prix is in fact a set of car and motorcycle races in a city circuit. During the days of the Grand Prix the city lives an extraordinary excitement: the noise of the engines, the crowds of tourists, the colourful decoration of the streets. All changes the rhythm of life during one week.

2006
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Now ~ end of Nov **Shanghai**

SH Int'l Mosaiculture

At the Shanghai International Mosaiculture 2006, horticultural art will be on display. Eighty works of living art from 55 cities in 15 countries will be displayed under this year's theme of "Earth, Home". The total area of the show will cover more than 240,000 km. The International Mosaiculture show has been held once every 3 years it was launched in 2000. Venue: Pudong Beautiful Century Park.

Oct 31 ~ Nov 8 **Guangxi**

Guilin Scenery Festival

An opening ceremony, and an autumn lantern festival on the Lijiang River will be held. Moreover, an evening tour of the Lijiang River will show beautifully shaped lanterns which combine sound, light, colour and movement. A bonfire party on Love Island, folk song and dance performances and barbecues are also held. Of course, don't miss the brilliant show directed by Zhang Yimou which is performed every night — *Impression • Liu Sanjie.*

Nov 3 ~ 6 **Taiwan**

Taipei Int'l Travel Fair

Organized by the Taiwan Visitors Association, the annual Fair is open to all travel agencies, airlines, hotels/resorts, government tourist offices, land operators, cruise lines, bus lines, trade publications, and other travel related organizations and enterprises.

Website: www.taipeiitf.org.tw

Potala Palace to Build Visitor Centre

The 471-square-metre visitor centre, which will be completed next year, will have a lounge and a projection hall screening films about the history of Potala Palace and its treasures.

To protect Potala Palace, administrators are restricting daily entries to 2,300 tourists. Tour groups will be granted 1,600 entries and the remainder will be distributed among Tibetans and individual tourists.

Standardization of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Process

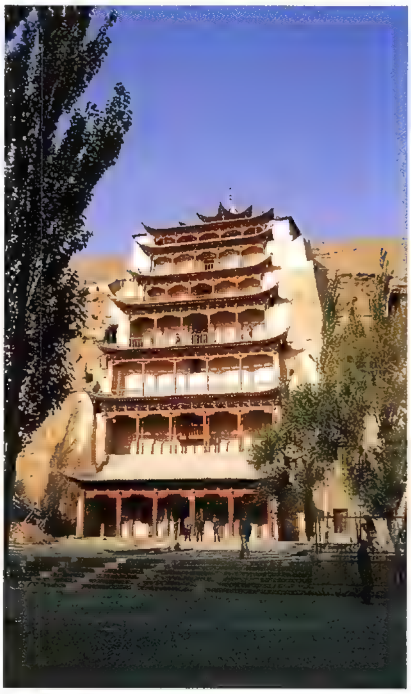
China will make an effort to standardize 500 traditional Chinese medicine remedies and procedures over the next five years. The standardization work will cover remedies, procedures, traditional medical terms and acupuncture standards, according to the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (SATCM). The new standards will help improve the quality of traditional medicines and make them more acceptable to other people.

Mogao Grottoes to Go Online in 2011

Archaeologists as well as ordinary people will be able to visit the world heritage Mogao Grottoes site in Gansu Province by browsing the Internet 2011.

China will digitize images of 170 of the finest Dunhuang Grottoes over a period of five years starting 2007. One hundred and forty-seven will be from the Mogao Grottoes and the rest from the Yulin Grottoes and Western Thousand Buddhas Caves. The database will also include cultural relics looted by foreign archaeologists in the early twentieth century. The move is designed to protect and popularize the 1,600-year-old grotto treasures in Dunhuang, particularly the Mogao Grottoes.

Dunhuang became a major market on the Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) period and is home to more than 800 grottoes. The Mogao Grottoes were added to the World Heritage List in 1987.



Heavy Fines for Degrading Scenic Spots

China is getting tough on human-caused environmental damage by issuing a detailed plan on protecting scenic spots recently. The Regulation on Scenic Spots consists of 52 articles in seven chapters, and will come into effect on December 1, 2006.

The new rule stipulates that new scenic spots cannot be established in existing natural reserves, while facilities that are not crucial to tourism, such as hotels and training centres, must be removed from these areas. Those who flout these rules or whose construction projects threaten the surrounding environment, including vegetation, wildlife, and water resources, may be fined between 500,000 and 1 million yuan (about US$63,000~126,000). Similar punishment will also be meted out who exploit mineral resources or produce explosive, inflammable, radioactive, toxic or erosive substances near tourism sites.

China to Increase Train Speed

China will launch a nationwide railway speed acceleration in 2007, the sixth time in nine years, with train speed reaching 200 km per hour for the first time.

China has finished the renovation of the 102-year-old Jiaoji Railway to make it allow trains to run at a speed of 200 km per hour. The railway, built in 1904, stretches 380 km from Jinan, capital of east China's Shandong Province, to the province's coastal city, Qingdao. The success of the experimental train on the Jiaoji Railway shows that China has managed the technology to raise train speed to 200 km per hour on existing rails. The nationwide speed raise is expected to boost China's transport capacity.

China to Construct World's Second Highest Airport

The world's second highest airport, to be built in Sichuan Province, is expected to open in 2008. Located in the Tibetan area of Kangding, it will be 4,280 metres above sea level, second only to Qamdo Airport in Tibet. The 960 million yuan (US$120.8 million) airport is able to handle 120-seat Boeing 737s and Airbus A319s. It will be designed to cope with 330,000 passengers annually.

Tianchi Lake to Be Restored

Tianchi Lake, an alpine lake and popular tourist spot in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, is to undergo four years of restoration work. Upon completion of the project, the tourism area around the lake will be enlarged from the present 158 sq km to 548 sq km.

Human activity has caused the southern bank to shrink by about 18 metres. Further, the depth of the lake has decreased by about 20 metres since 1992. As a result, some 6.7 hectares of the grassland on the southern bank have turned into sand.

Smoke-free in HK's Parks and Beaches

Parks and beaches could become smoke-free zones of Hong Kong next year, alongside indoor venues and working places, according to the newly revised anti-smoking bill of Hong Kong government.

The legislators added parks and beaches to the controversial anti-smoking bill last Friday. The Legislative Council bills committee on the Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Bill agreed to the amendment at the end of 15 months' deliberation on the bill.

Lamma Island

Shanghai to Be Asia's Aviation Hub

According to a strategic plan of the Shanghai Airport Group, Shanghai will achieve this target by 2015 in three phases. From 2005 to 2007, the Pudong Airport and Hongqiao Airport will be able to handle about 50 million passengers and 3.1 million tons of cargo each year, along with the improvement of airports' infrastructure.

The two airports will handle 84 million passengers and 5 million tons of cargo a year after the expansion of Hongqiao Airport is finished and the second phase of Pudong Airport project is complete in the 2007 ~ 2010 period. From 2010 to 2015, Shanghai will handle 110 million passengers and 7 million tons of cargo yearly.

Boom in Industrial and Agricultural Tours

For days, the tourists who visited the liquor history cultural gallery in Xinjiang Number One Cellar Gucheng Liquor Co., Ltd were in an endless stream. Gucheng Liquor Co., Ltd possesses a brewing history of more than 600 years. In 2002, when constructing liquor warehouse, the company discovered an ancient cellar in late Ming and early Qing Dynasty. Based on it, the company built up this liquor history cultural gallery. There are more than 300 historical cultural relics, including celadon liquor bowl and liquor gallipot, which attract many tourists for appreciation. At present, China National Tourism Administration has awarded Xinjiang Number One Cellar Gucheng Liquor Co., Ltd as the model industrial tourist spot at state level.

Xinjiang has abundant industrial and agricultural resources. Up to now, there are more than 10 model industrial and agricultural tourist spots. The reclamation armies, oil, coal, steel and other industries all set up tourist demonstrations.

World's Longest Water Diversion Tunnel

A water diversion tunnel under construction in Northeast China's Liaoning Province is set to become the world's longest manmade tunnel. The tunnel – with a diametre of eight metres and running through 50 hills, 50 river valleys and 29 geographic faults – will be 85.3 km long on completion in 2008. Until now, 53.13 km of tunnel has been finished so far and will soon break the record held by Switzerland's 57-km Gotthard Base Tunnel.

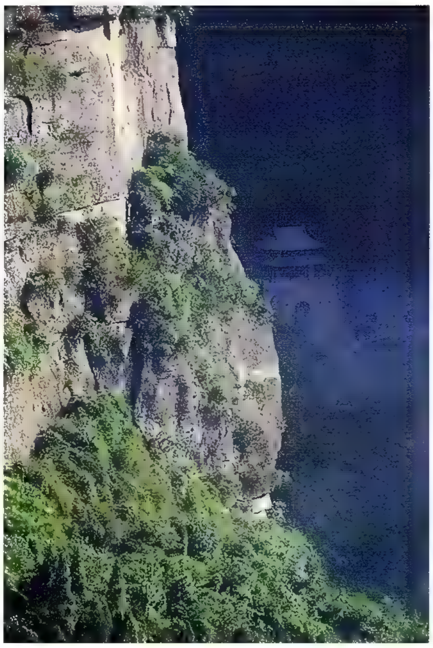
The tunnel and diversion pipelines with a total length of 231 km will bring water from the Dahuofang Reservoir in the east of Liaoning Province to 10 million people in six industrial cities in the province's central region. The whole project will be built at an estimated cost of 10.3 billion yuan (US$1.3 billion).

Xi'an to Tackle Traffic Congestion

Xi'an, capital city of Northwest China's Shaanxi Province, has begun building its first subway line, in an effort to ease traffic congestion and protect its famous cultural sites.

Construction of the rest of the 26.4-km No. 2 subway line will begin in the second quarter in 2007. No. 2 subway line, which links North Railway Station to Weiqu in the south, has 20 stations and is expected to open in 2011, said the office. The line will cost a total of 9.78 billion yuan (US$1.2 billion). It will be built 20 metres underground to protect a 13.7-km city wall dating back to the early Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

A construction plan approved by the State Council provides for six subway lines with a total length of 251.8 km. The city will build the 50.3 km of No.1 and No.2 subway lines in the period 2006 ~ 2015.



Sichuan

Elevator at Ancient Site Stopped

An intermittent project to build an elevator near the ancient Sword Gate Pass (Jianmenguan) on the famous Shu Path has finally been stopped although much damage has still been caused to the tourist destination. The path used to be the only link between northern China and Sichuan Province, known as Shu in ancient times.

The elevator work, carried out on and off for more than 10 years, was aimed at making it easier for visitors to get up the mountain pass. Now there is a barren slope the elevator's construction site about 20 metres high and five metres wide next to the green mountain.

Ningxia

New Wetlands Park Operates in Yinchuan

A state-level wetlands park located in Yinchuan, capital of northwestern Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, the Yinchuan Wetlands Park is the country's third state-level wetlands park, consists of two parts: the Yuehai and Mingcui Lake wetlands areas. The Yuehai wetlands, covering over 2,000 hectares, consists of lakes, marshes and meadows, and is home to 114 plant types and 107 bird species. The Mingcui Lake wetlands covers more than 660 hectares and is a healthy reed environment.

Wetlands totalling 2.8 million hectares are scattered in the Yellow River valley. The Yellow River springs from the northwestern Qinghai Province and flows eastward through Gansu Province, Ningxia and other regions before emptying into the Bohai Sea in Shandong Province. China has 66 million hectares of wetlands, the most in Asia and fourth-largest in the world.

Beijing

Temple of Heaven Reopens

Nearly 30 years after its last make-over, the Heavenly Vault has finally been restored to its original luster. The work focused on repainting the eaves, and touching-up drawings. Experts found that updates to the drawings, done in the 1970's, took an improper diversion from history. Every detail at the temple must be maintained. Over more than 400 years since the vault was built, repair work has virtually never ceased. But everything from the structure itself, to the paintings, must remain the same. Any tiny alteration will destroy continuity."

Repairs to the Altar of Heaven were less complicated. Its three tiers of white marble floors and railings have been carefully checked for cracks. The work has cost 9 million yuan.

Culture

100,000 Cultural Relics Under State Protection

According to the State Cultural Relics Bureau, more than 100,000 cultural relics in 1,330 Chinese museums are under the national-level protection. Fifteen museums in China have a collection of more than 500 national-level protected cultural relics each, and 67 have more than 500 pieces. Shaanxi, Gansu, Shandong and Hubei are the provinces with the most national-level protected cultural relics in the country.

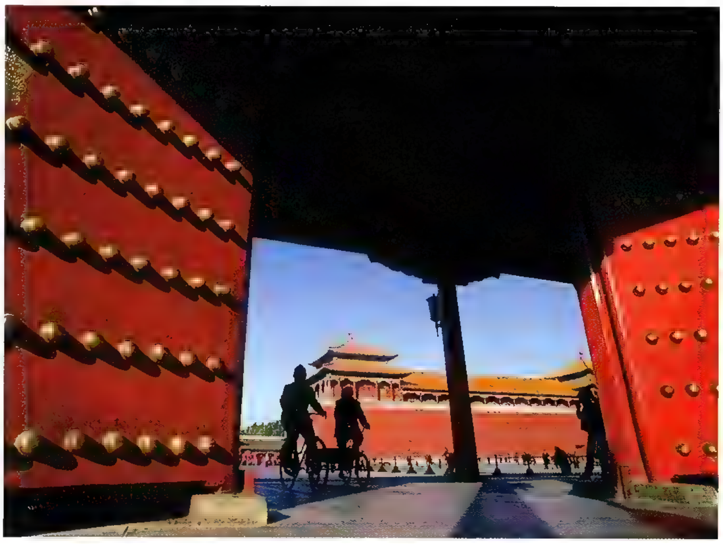
Beijing

"Palace Museum", "Forbidden City" Become China's Name Brands

Early in October, China's imperial Palace Museum vowed that it may take legal action to secure its intellectual rights involving the best-known Palace Museum and Forbidden City as the two names have been awarded "Name Brands of China."

Many companies and individuals have tried to register "Palace Museum" or "Forbidden City" as brandnames for their own use. In 2004 alone, 20 such applications were announced by the administration. The Museum has found more than 100 kinds of commodities or companies named after the imperial palace, including even noodle vendors and wedding ceremony services.

Following its application, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce approved two trade marks as "name brands of China" in this June.



Nature

Global Recognition for Chinese Geo-parks

Six more China's national geoparks have joined the Global Geopark Network recently at the second International Geo-parks Conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The six geoparks are Mt Taishan Geopark in Shandong Province; Wangwu-Daimei Moutains Geopark and Funiushan Geopark in Henan Province; Leiqiong Volcano Geopark in Guangdong and Hainan Provinces; Fangshan Geopark in Beijing Municipality and Hebei Province and Jingpo Lake Geopark in Heilongjiang Province.

According to UNESCO a geo-park is a territory with outstanding geological interest as well as archaeological, ecological or cultural value where there are considerable local efforts being made to preserve and enhance the heritage.

Qinghai

First Tibetan Medical Culture Museum Opens

The museum, opened in Xining, capital city of northwest China's Qinghai Province, is the first museum displaying the culture and evolution of traditional Tibetan medicine.

Taking up 12,000 square meters and costing 120 million yuan (US$15 million), the museum boasts over 2,000 botanic and animal specimens, 80 wall maps, 1,000 books and 180 surgical appliances about 1,300 years old. The museum is helpful in protecting traditional Tibetan medicine as cultural heritage and enhancing academic exchanges of Chinese Tibetan medicine with the outside world.

Guangdong

Guangzhou Metro Daily Launches

A free newspaper, *Guangzhou Metro Daily* published by Guangzhou Daily Press Group and Guangzhou Metro Corp, was launched on Oct 1 in Guangzhou, capital of South China's Guangdong Province. Targeting the city's increasing number of subway passengers, it carries 24 colour pages with news, consumption information and supplements. It is being published on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during its trial period, but it could come out on five week days in the future.

The average age of Guangzhou metro passengers is 35.6, with white-collar workers accounting for 41 per cent of the total.

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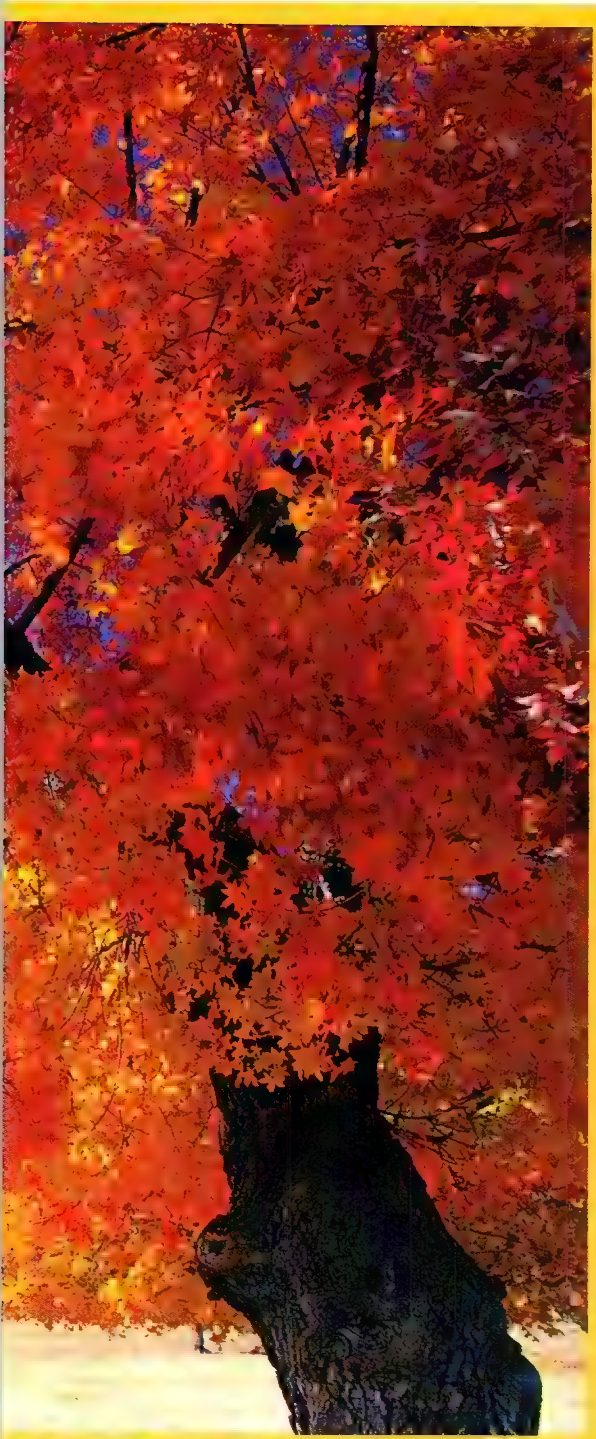
MAPLES IN DAIQIN TAL

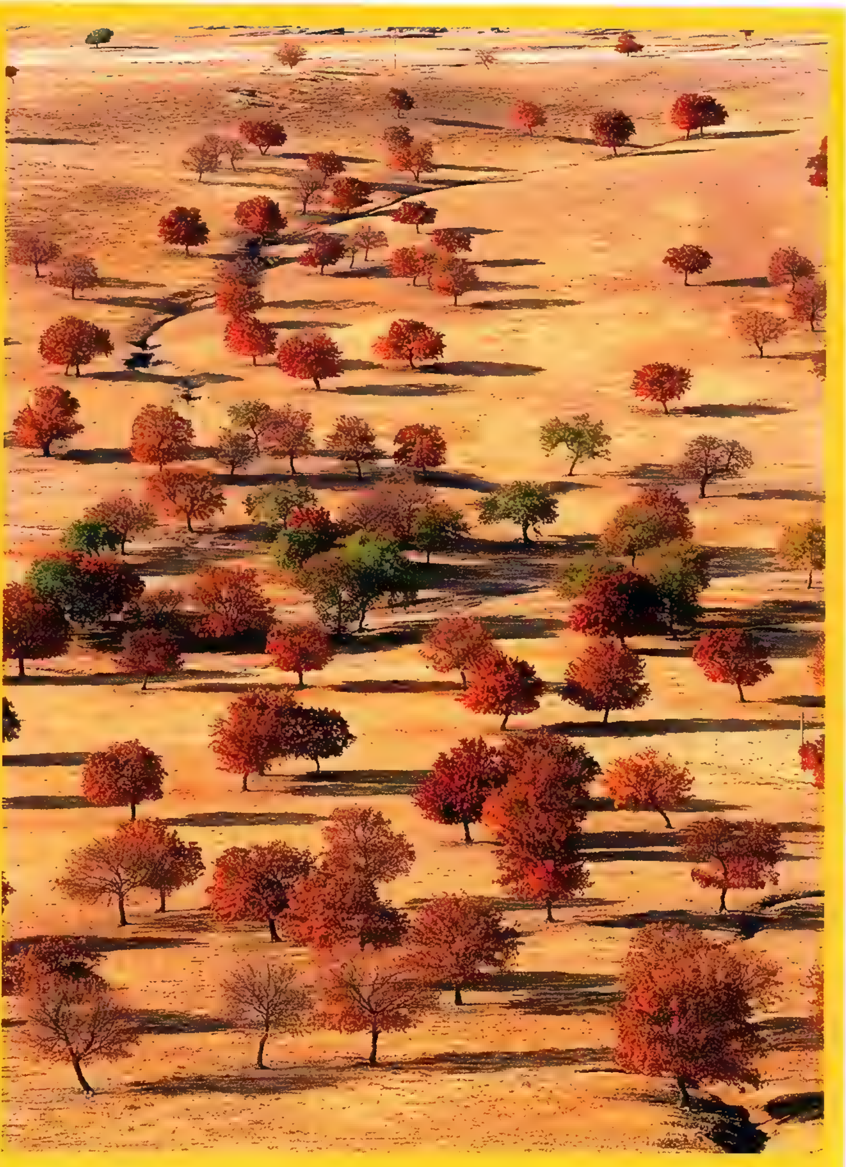
Photos: Wang Xuelin

Daiqin Tal, meaning "the grassland of heroes" in Mongolian language, is located in the Daiqin Tal Township. The township is 20 km south of Tuquan County, and north of the Horqin Right Wing Middle Banner of North China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

An unspoiled hilly land, Daiqin Tal owns quality farmlands and fertile land, hence has attracted the Mongo and Han people to stay.

Behind the Township Government seat, there is an expansive area of maple tree forest, which was once the rear mountain of the royal Horqin Kingdom. Legend has it that the seeds of maple trees were originally introduced to Daiqin Tai by a princess married from Beijing city. Deep in autumn time starting October, the maple trees all turn to golden or scarlet, as if evening glows in the sky. Herds of sheep, local farmers, wild grasslands, and maple altogether create a captivating scenery.





Travel Tips

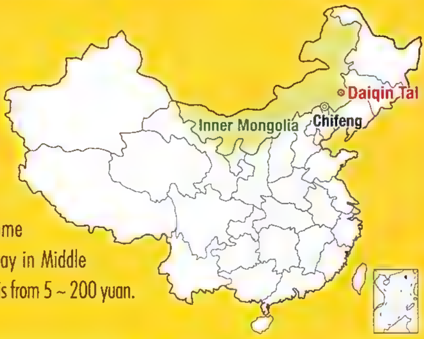
Transport

By train: - Take a train from Beijing or Shenyang (Liaoning Province) to Tongliao (Inner Mongolia). Change a train from Tongliao to Huolin Gel, and take off at Middle Banner of Horqin Right Wing. Then take a long-distance bus or grab a taxi for about 20 km to reach Daiqin Tal.

- Take a train from Harbin (Heilongjiang Province) or Changchun (Jilin Province) to Ulanhot. Then take off at Daiqin Tal from the long-distance bus to Middle Banner of Horqin Right Wing.

By car: - If driving from Beijing or Qiqihar to Jagdaqi by following the 111 National Highway, one will pass the Township Government. In front of its building, take a long-distance bus which departs from Tongliao to Tuquan, and take off at Daiqin Tal.

- If driving from Harbin or Changchun, one can take a train to Baichengshi, from there take a long-distance bus to Middle Banner of Horqin Right Wing. Then drive for another 10 km to reach Daiqin Tal by passing Yaonan city in Tuquan County.



Accommodation

There are no hotels at the site so far, although some simple guesthouses can be found. Travellers can stay in Middle Banner of Horqin Right Wing, or Tuquan County. The cost is from 5 ~ 200 yuan. A not-bad option is to stay in local farmers' houses.

1

Being Snowed in Xi'an

2

Drawing the heavy curtains aside in my coxy Shangri-La Golden Flower hotel suite, just to let first light of morning in, to be greeted by a city swathed in whiteness—snow was falling, covering everything including the bent down branches of a tall pine growing by the window. I planned a trip into the snow, full of excitement.

Photos & Article · Tony Henderson

As instructed by the map, I took a taxi to the nearest destination – Xing Qing Park – before taking an early afternoon flight back to Hong Kong. Soon, I was in the chilly breezes and gently falling snow on a Sunday morning in Xi'an – the streets appeared empty.

Upon arrival, the park looked pretty much deserted though workmen (and women) were busy digging and cementing around the entrance. My photography made them stop and smile a bit, their toil evident in the way their breath spouted on condensing in the cold morning air. I was soon walking amid the parkland, the snow slushy underfoot, and me not caring as watery snow splashed around my feet but I had to take care not to slip down slopes into side channels.

Blackbirds were heard with their typical shrill trill as they otherwise silently flew from one shrub to another, dusting snow off the branches. The winding lake, squat pines, pagodas and everything looked so charming yet were all covered in snow.

I kept myself just out of sight of a group of women who were competing with winter bird song and listened as they practised. Amazingly, only a couple of metres or so away, a woodpecker searched the torn bark of a winter-shorn tree, seeking hibernating insects. It was unaware of my presence. Such a rare pleasure. It was drilling into the older branches.

That morning was very enjoyable despite the cold and slush and back at the hotel it seemed opportune to draw the coffee table to the window, place the armchair comfortably, lay out a napkin (serviette) and huge chunky cheese sandwich and polish a glass before setting wine down before me. With that scene of Xi'an city to my front, I dug in and reminisced on my few days in that ancient capital.

I had been out to see the Terracotta Warriors of course. It is simply a "must" for every western traveller in China. In my case it was taken in at pace and I had to indulge in peach brandy to ward off the cold and give courage when fighting off the roughest gang of souvenir sellers ever encountered, physically having to run a blockade of urchins and scallywags who would not take no for an answer.

1. The snows lightly sprinkle the roofs and trees on Xing Qing Park, Xi'an.

2. Visitors, domestic and from overseas, dawdle in the wide open square before entering the halls to view the Terracotta Warriors.

3. Snow capped pagoda in Xing Qing Park.

4. Wet snow bends branches to breaking point.

About Xi'an

Greater Xi'an – called Chang'an in olden days – has a population of around seven million. Its central walled city – 10 miles of wall – encloses a cityscape not different from what lies outside the walls and as such the place has its modern high-rises and wide streets typical of China's cities. This city is the capital of Shaanxi Province (as different from Shanxi Province which lies to the west!), situated in the east of Northwest China. The Weihe River cuts through the middle of the province, channelling into the great Yellow River to the east.

Photos • Lu Linglong Article • Dianna Lau

DIVINE DAOCHENG

"Where in all the world is to be found scenery comparable to that which awaits the explorer and photographer in north-western Sichuan Province, China and in the mountain fastnesses of Tsarung, in south-eastern Tibet?"

When I first read those words, I instantly wondered which place in West China could possibly have excited the author — Australian-American explorer Joseph F. Rock (1884 —1962) — so much.

The answer had already been revealed in the article "Konka Risumgongba, Holy Mountain of the Outlaws", published in the July 1931 issue of *National Geographic* Magazine, in which Rock's writing on the secluded Daocheng, or Konkaling, hidden in the heartland of Sichuan Province, first piqued the interest of the general public.

The "Chonggu Rainbow", one of the unique natural wonders of the Yading Scenic Area.

Icy waterfalls tumble and splash down from an awesome glacier, revealing Nature's gentler side.

Scarlet autumn leaves.

1

2

Previous spread: Sacred Mount Xiannairi (6,032 metres above sea level) goes by the Tibetan name "Shenrezig", which means Bodhisattva. This is the North Peak of a trinity of sacred mountains that includes the snow-capped peaks of Yangmaiyong (Jambeyang) and Xianuoduojie (Chandordje). It is also the fifth highest mountain in Sichuan Province.

Daocheng is a rare natural treasure. Its mountains, waters, grasses, plants and trees take so many charming forms: (1) The highland plant Saussurea Gnaphalium; (2) a moss-banked gurgling creek; (3) fallen leaves in the frost; and, (4 & 5) delicate wildflowers make lovely photographs.

3

4

5

Daocheng: Lost Horizon Found

1. Red Grass Swamp near a village in Daocheng.

2. A secluded mountain valley.

3. Heading out to pasture early in the morning.

Almost without exception, anyone who sees photos of Daocheng cannot help exclaiming, "Wow, what a beautiful place! I must go there…" But when they learn it is about 4,000 metres up and deep in the Hengduan Mountains of southwest Sichuan Province, they usually change their minds.

Inspiration for Shangri-La

Even the very real possibility of altitude sickness could not keep me from going.

Before the trip, I studied quite a lot of information on the Internet and consulted many guidebooks. I was most impressed by the admiration American botanist and explorer Joseph Rock (1884 —1962) expressed for Daocheng and its surrounding areas in his expedition reports. In 1933, English novelist James Hilton, who had never been there, relied heavily on Rock's descriptions to write his popular novel *Lost Horizon*. (My English copy is the 105th edition!)

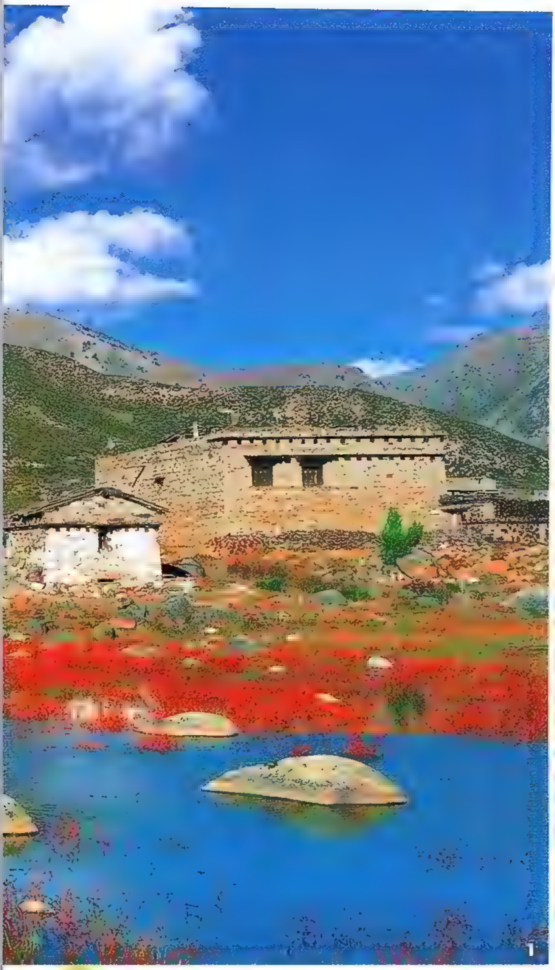
The paradise described in Hilton's book is blessed with unsurpassed scenery, abundant natural resources and a peaceful mix of different ethnic groups. It's a fictional world free of care and conflict. The book provided the western world with a welcome respite from the harsh realities of the Depression in the 1930s. "Shangri-La", a word coined in the novel, instantly became the most fascinating term in the English language, synonymous with "the garden of Eden" or "Nirvana".

Autumn's Best, but June Will Do

The best season to visit Daocheng is during golden late autumn. The mountains transform into a huge tapestry of ochre and scarlet leaves against a transparent azure sky. The snow-clad peaks are enchanting in this setting and it is almost impossible to take a bad photo.

The mini-bus from Shangri-La left at 7 am and would deposit me in Daocheng 12 hours later. As we climbed north up the plateau, the temperature dropped gradually. Heading east to Xiangcheng, Sichuan, I watched as the initially bright green vegetation outside was suddenly exchanged for a vast expanse of snow.

Jean was a medical school student from France. Determined to see the world, he suspended his studies for a year. He had started his travels more than six months earlier in South America, then headed to South Asia, and eventually to Yunnan via Thailand. He planned a three-month sojourn in China. He spoke fluent English and was keen to learn other languages and explore different cultures, which was why he kept trying to converse with the locals on the bus.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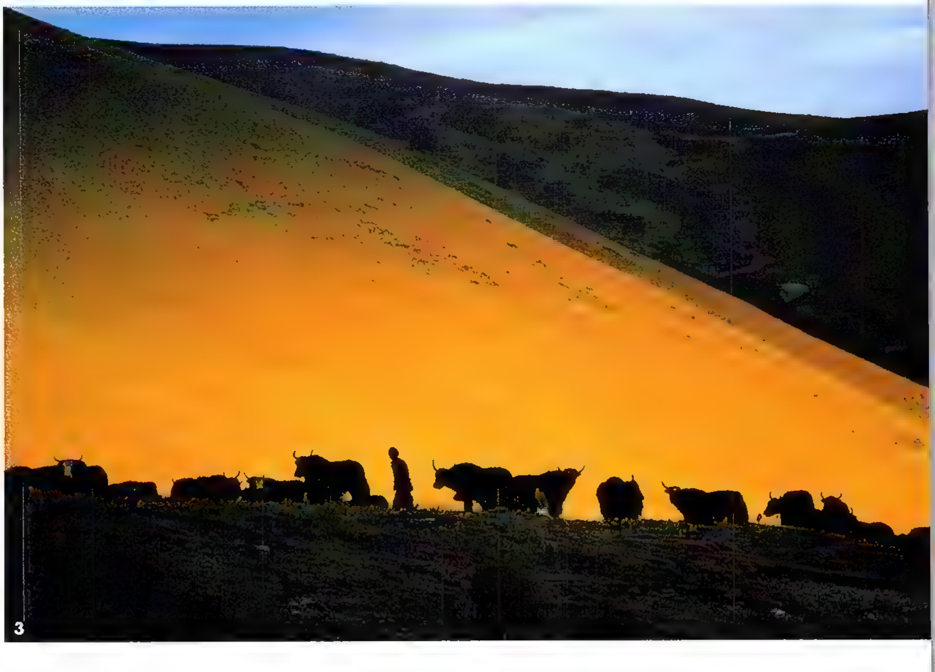
World without Strangers

All nine tourists ended up staying on the same floor at a hotel nearby the bus station. A double room with bath was only 40 yuan, while a single was a fraction of that — a great bargain. I didn't hesitate to treat myself to my own room. Finally, some privacy! All the other tourists opted for their own rooms as well, except for Jean. He stared at the receptionist and moaned, "40 yuan! Tai gui le (too expensive)!" The receptionist would not back down, but suggested a larger room without a bath. "One bed, 15 yuan!" Jean insisted. He was obviously a veteran backpacker who didn't mind roughing it to save a little money. He later said that at most he was willing to pay 20 yuan for one bed in a double room. He even asked if I would like to share a room and split the cost, explaining that we could each save 20 yuan a day!

But my penny-pinching days were behind me. I preferred to pay an extra 20 bucks for a night of peace and privacy. Jean was a bit let down, but the receptionist was somehow moved by his persistence and accepted his terms. In an effort to honour the backpacker credo, I told him, "You may put your valuables in my room for safekeeping — just in case."

The purpose of my visit to Daocheng was to see and hike around as much of the three sacred mountains at the heart of this alleged Shangri-La as possible. Jean talked to some travellers who had just come down from the Shenrezig trail that circles the peaks. They told him he could camp at Luorong Pasture on the first day and start the pilgrimage early the next morning. It would take just 10 hours for a fit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hiker to complete an unusual trail that wound its way along some 4,000 to 5,000 metres above sea level. Afterwards, he could meet a driver who would bring him back in the afternoon.

I was interested in hiking the big path that encircled all three sacred mountains, but I couldn't find much information, such as how many days were needed to complete it, the stops along the trail, etc. If it was going to take a few days, I would have to carry food and gear, making it a huge challenge for me! As we pondered such a journey, Jean and I hesitated. We then decided to start together the next day, circling only Shenrezig.

Two for the Road

After dinner I returned to my room, while Jean went to the ATM to get some money. What happened next changed our whole itinerary.

Sorting through my backpack, I discovered that I only had a few hundred Reminbi and a few hundred Hong Kong dollars. Only later did I realize I had forgotten to bring more money as I was rushing to prepare for the trip. Now I had only just enough money to get back to Chengdu.

Half an hour later, Jean arrived at my door looking equally despondent. His ATM card was useless in Daocheng. He said he had been able get money in many other backward places, and now he had only a few hundred Reminbi left. It simply wasn't enough.

I felt sorry for Jean, as I have been in similar situations on the road. But every time I have met good people who helped me. I told him we may as well go along together since we had come this far. I offered to pay for our trip first, but also told him frankly about my own misfortune. If two nearly broke drifters off to see the world spent stingily until we reached Kangding, a larger town with many banks, we stood a better chance. We both agreed — we really had no other choice!

Two Days and One Night in Yading

It turned out to be unnecessary to rent a jeep

1. Nestled at the foot of Mt Shenrezig, Zhenzhuhai (Pearl Lake) is 4,100 metres above sea level. It is called Drolmala Tso in Tibetan, meaning "Fairy Lake".

2. Mani stone mounds in front of Chonggu Monastery, near Mt Shenrezig.

3. Rubuchaka Hot Spring is said to cure disease.

4. Lamas perform dharma rituals.

beforehand. Local drivers approach individual travellers at the bus station or hotels. Once they fill a jeep with six passengers, they leave for Yading, charging 50 yuan a head. When they don't have enough passengers, they make a lot of excuses to delay departure and lay the blame on the passengers who booked the jeep. Drivers can easily be found on the street. Look for a jeep that is nearly full so you can leave immediately.

Our jeep departed at 5:30 am at the request of two passengers. When we reached the area of Yading Village, the driver stopped to let us take pictures. Shenrezig had been veiled in clouds and fog, but we cheered as it now revealed itself briefly. Unlike the drier autumn, in spring there is ample rainfall and mist, so the snow-capped mountains rarely come into view. As the peak appeared, an old man travelling with us exclaimed, "I don't regret this trip now!"

At 9 am, we arrived at the ticket office for the nature reserve. Our hearts were pounding as Jean presented his international student card, fearing it would be rejected. A full-price ticket was 150 yuan, but a student ticket was only 80 yuan. The staff in the ticket office scrutinized the card, front and back, over and over again, and at last allowed the discount. They gave each of us a CD about Daocheng that looked promising, an environmentally rubbish bag and a feedback form. Tourists who returned the bag and the completed form at the end of the visit would receive a free souvenir. What a good idea!

At 10 am, we reached the parking lot of the nature reserve. The driver reminded us that he would be there waiting at 4 pm the next day.

The rest of the group entered the nature reserve, but Jean and I stopped to fill up our stomachs first. As we did not have enough left to hire horses for the trip, we would have to keep walking and we would not make it on empty bellies. We ordered our food carefully from one of the restaurants near the entrance. One dish, one bowl of soup, plus plain rice cost us 30

Sacred Mountains of Yading

According to the Secret Book of the Sacred Zari Mountain, the three snow-capped mountains in the Yading Scenic Area are together ranked 11th among the 24 sacred mountains of Tibetan Buddhism.

In 747, Padmasambhava (one of the founders of Tibetan Buddhism) named the trio of mountains after the three most important bodhisattvas of Tibetan Buddhism, hence the overall name "Sanhuzhu", which means etrinity of three sacred mountains'. The north peak Shenrezig (6,032 metres) represents Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion; the south peak Jambeyang (5,958 metres) represents Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom; and the east peak Chanadorje (also 5,958 metres) represents Vajrapani, the Bodhisattva of Power.

Buddhist legend has it that circling the Sanhuzhu three times can redeem the sin of killing up to eight horses or men, that circling it once is equal to the good deed of reciting the six-syllable mantra Om Mani Padme Hum 100 million times, and that circling it in the Year of the Rooster in the Tibetan calendar will multiply the good deed even more. Many pious believers dream of circling the sacred mountain at least once in their lives. The sacred mountain must be circled on foot. There are two types of circling — making a small circle around Shenrezig and completing a larger circle around Sanhuzhu Mountain. The small circle can be completed in one day, while the larger circle takes two to three days.

4

1. At 5,958 metres above sea level, Jambeyang, meaning Manjushri in Tibetan, symbolizes Buddha's wisdom. This is the South Peak of Sanhuzhu Snow Mountain.

2. Chanadorje, which means Vajrapani in Tibetan, symbolizes Buddha's power to exorcise evil.

3. The glacier in autumn.

yuan, which was something for such food in this area. We gobbled it all down before we set off.

We passed the stable where horses and donkeys could be hired: it was 40 yuan one-way from the starting point to Chonggu Monastery, or 100 yuan one-way from the starting point to Luorong Pasture. If you were only moderately energetic or were likely to suffer from altitude sickness on the highland, it would be worth paying a little more to enjoy the scenery on horseback and help the local farmers earn some extra money as well.

We walked slowly along a forested trail, lined on both sides with primordial pyramid-shaped mani stone mounds. Some of the mani mounds were creatively stacked on tree trunks, rendering them more striking than many Western modern art installations I've seen. We walked briskly for 45 minutes until we reached the bridge at the Chonggu Monastery, overhung with colourful prayer flags. The monastery lay just over the bridge, some 3,900 metres above sea level.

Beautiful Blue Moon Valley

With the sacred mountain Shenrezig as a backdrop, the sacrosanct Chonggu Monastery appeared in the distance. In 1928, Rock spent three days here during an expedition to the area. He later described gazing out through the small Tibetan-style windows of the monastery at the moon-lit valley and the peaceful hamlet. That moment was condensed by James Hilton into the description of the Blue Moon Valley in his bestseller Lost Horizon.

Chonggu Monastery was established in the Yuan Dynasty (1271—1368), and is now undergoing. The statue of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelukpa, or Yellow Sect, is worshipped in the monastery. Statues of other deities include the Sanhuzhu Goddess of

Mercy, Manjushri (Bodhisattva of Compassion), and Vajrapani (Bodhisattva of Power). After learning I had come a long way to visit the monastery, a monk tied a red string around my wrist, praying for good wishes and a safe journey for me.

Makeshift wooden lodges were available for tourists outside the monastery. The elderly man from our jeep fell sick on the way to Luorong Pasture and had returned to stay here. He planned to take pictures of Shenrezig early the next morning when the first golden rays of the sun spread over the snow-clad peak. We did not have enough time to stay and do the same, and so we missed the chance of to see the beauty of the mountain in a different light.

Moving on, we came upon the chillingly beautiful Pearl Lake (Drolmala Co). The path from Chonggu Monastery first penetrated a forest and then entered a meadow. Though not rugged, the trail was still quite physically demanding. Some tourists would pay more to stay on horseback. This leg of the trip, which took about 20 minutes, was absolutely worthwhile even though it was tough as the scenery along the way was fascinating. Wide jewel-green meadows, forests, creeks, mani stone mounds, small donkeys and, to top it all off, the majestic snow-peaked mountain within arm's reach — all added up to an incredibly charming paradise.

At the far end of the meadow, Pearl Lake, also called Fairy Lake, spread invitingly before us. At 4,100 metres above sea level, it resembled an emerald embedded in the lotus throne of Avalokiteshvara. Garlanded by plaits of rhododendrons in full bloom, the lake was beautiful beyond words, and tourists lingered as long as they could.

Dazzling Sanhuzhu Mountain

Reluctantly, we tore ourselves away from Pearl Lake and returned on the same trail to Chonggu Monastery, where we headed back to the main trail for Chonggu Meadow. Chonggu Meadow is a good place to view Shenrezig and Chanadorje. Originally a glacier barrier lake, it is now a huge U-shaped glaciated valley. The current landform of Chonggu Meadow emerged after it was flooded and devastated by the glacial lakes at the foot of Shenrezig. Walking amidst the open meadow, creeks and snow-topped mountains, I did not feel tired at all. Only the gasps of awe around me reminded me that I was still firmly on Earth.

At 4:30 pm, we came to Chanadorje, described by Rock as "a truncated pyramid flanked by broad buttresses like the wings of some stupendous bat." Chanadorje means Vajrapani, a sacred mountain symbolic of the Buddha's power. Tibetans had erected mani stone mounds and hung prayer flags on them. A Tibetan woman was circling the mounds, chanting prayers in a low voice. She circled three times, the first time to pray for the compassion of Avalokiteshvara, the second time to pray for the wisdom of Manjushri and the third time to pray for the power of Vajrapani.

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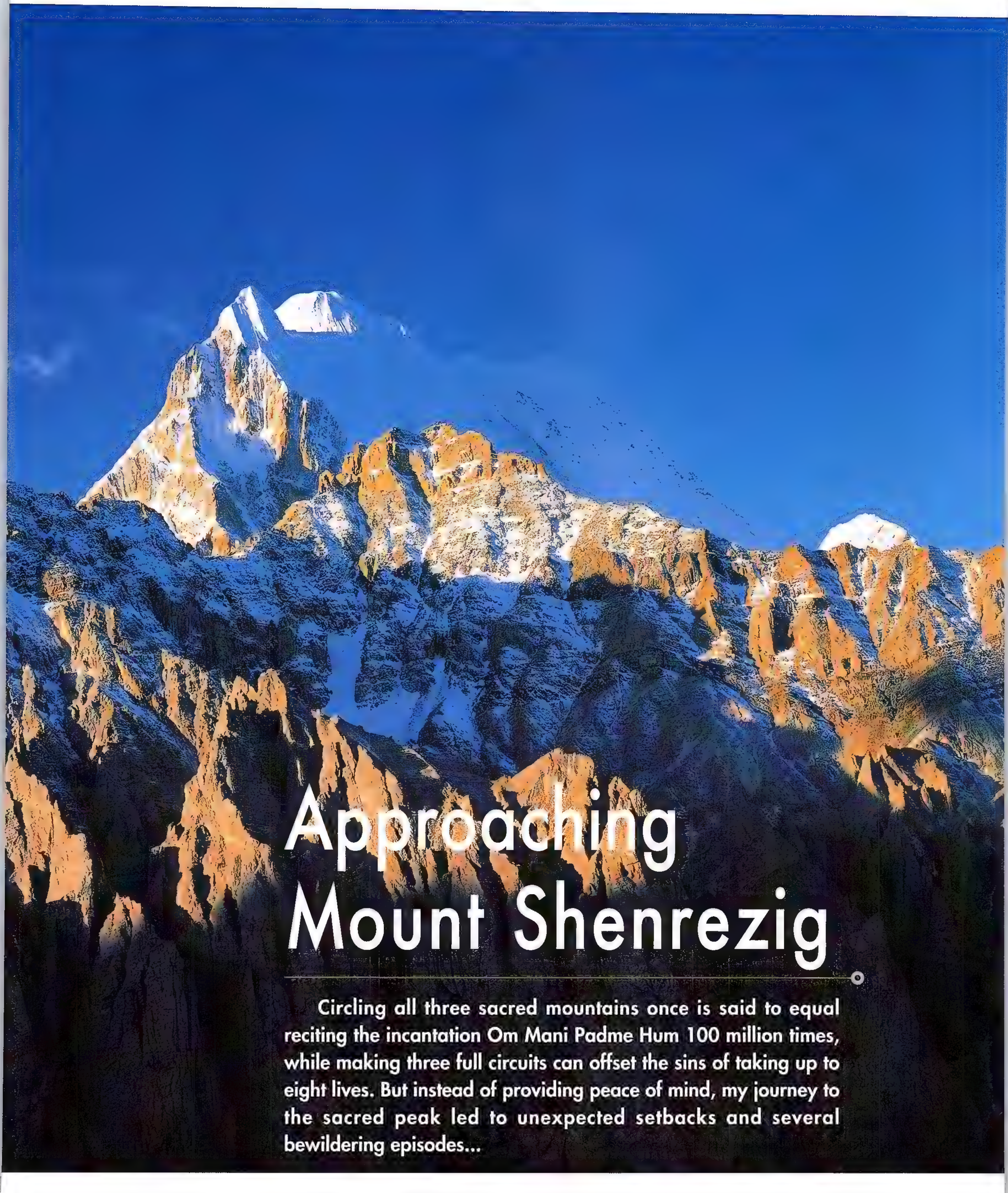
The campsite at Luorong Pasture, a large military tent, was not far from Chanadorje. Although the tent was shabby, it occupied the best location for the most magnificent panoramic view of all three sacred mountains. The back of the tent offered the best view of all. As we watched, Jambeyang eventually came into view! The top of the mountain resembled the Sword of Wisdom, piercing the sky impressively, in the hand of Manjushri. No wonder Rock was "overwhelmed" by the character of Jambeyang and considered it the "finest mountain" his eyes had "ever beheld".

Translated by Zhang Boli



Approaching Mount Shenrezig

Circling all three sacred mountains once is said to equal reciting the incantation Om Mani Padme Hum 100 million times, while making three full circuits can offset the sins of taking up to eight lives. But instead of providing peace of mind, my journey to the sacred peak led to unexpected setbacks and several bewildering episodes...

After a sound night's sleep, I woke well before 6 am, hoping to view the beautiful snow-capped mountains at daybreak. Spring is typically cloudy and rainy, so my expectations were low. But then the heavens opened up to reveal the "white pyramid" of sacred Mount Jambeyang, a sight I will never forget.

What's Your Hurry?

We had full daylight by 6 am, so we put away our newly bought torches. After sleeping so well, Jean and I set off in high spirits. Following the directions a Tibetan local had given us the day before we walked into the wetland behind the tents, crossed a wooden bridge, and found the starting point for the path around Mount Shenrezig. As we were leaving we noticed just how splendid Mount Jambeyang was viewed from here, something that had not been apparent the night before because of all the cloud cover. Unfortunately, time was pressing and we could not linger. Should we return after our tour around Mount Shenrezig? Or stay here a few more days? Our financial situation made the decision for us; we must move on.

I left with some regret, following Jean up the path, but he walked faster and faster, leaving me far behind. At six feet tall, he trotted along as if I was as young, long-legged and strong as him. I eventually had to run to keep pace with him so that we didn't become separated.

But it tested my patience. What was the point of rushing with so little time, money, strength and oxygen to spare? Did we really need to hurry? Weren't we making a pilgrimage around a sacred peak? Shouldn't we show a little more reverence and move at a more respectful pace? I felt so conflicted! But what could I do? It was not his fault; he was merely trying to escape an embarrassing situation and ensure that we left Daocheng for Kangding on time. If we missed the bus at 4 pm, we would be stuck here another day, with even less money to live on. It could be disastrous if we ended up spending the fares for Kangding.

Going Round in Circles

Having accepted our situation, I returned my attention to reality. Maybe my heated emotions were a reaction to the high altitude. I admonished myself to keep a cool head!

After leaving Nyru Yak Farm, we climbed hard for over an hour and finally arrived at a higher place strewn with long,narrow Buddhist flags and marked by signs in Tibetan, which we didn't understand. We only knew that we needed to head to Milk Lake and Five-Colour Lake, as yet unaware of their Tibetan names, Orong Co and Tenzin Co. We hesitated, worried about losing our way on the plateau. Worn out from the hike and too tired to think, our morale could sink at any moment and we might make a disastrous decision.

Luckily, many Tibetan people climb the mountains to dig for caterpillar fungi in June and one now approached. I found most Tibetans we met in the scenic areas to be like-minded; they wouldn't pass up the chance to make a profit, but they respected other people and never hassled visitors.

Suddenly, I thought of the two Tibetan locals we'd met outside my tent the night before. They had warned us that the scenic area was within range of the sacred peak and reminded us to be respectful of the place, to enjoy nature without damaging the environment.

Sacred Nature Everywhere

The fungi hunter pointed us in the right direction and soon we reached the stunning Milk Lake, at an altitude of 4,500 metres. The ancient glacier lake shimmers like a turquoise ornament and is fed by the melting ice and snow on the surrounding peaks. Large expanses of glaciers hang above it. The sacred lake was said to cure deafness and dumbness. As I marvelled at the purity around me and the brilliantly coloured water, I decided that even the most reticent person would exclaim excitedly at the sight. Standing before the glaciers, which gleamed with a subtle green lustre, I silently wished that all people had a chance to enjoy such unspoiled natural beauty in their lives.

Both Jean and I stopped in our tracks simultaneously to appreciate it fully, taking a few pictures before we continued.

After Milk Lake, our next stop should have been Five-Colour Lake, but there were no signs to guide us. Eventually we met another Tibetan who told us we had missed it and explained that it would take more than an hour to reach it. With our limited time and energy, we opted to forgo this sacred lake praised as the most characteristic one in the scenic area. Located between the Shenrezig and Jambeyang peaks at an altitude of 4,600 metres, Tenzin Co features a relatively recently formed nappe that extends down the lakeside. Apparently, whenever the sun shines on the lake, reflecting the snow-covered mountains on its surface, miraculous colours and images appear.

I wondered whether these tales were really true, but looking at my watch, I knew my own destiny: We were doomed if we did not keep going.

Tibetan Kindness

We met two types of Tibetans along the way, either those on pilgrimages or those looking for

Previous spread: Mounts Jambeyang and Shenrezig.

1. Stunning Milk Lake (altitude: 4,500 metres) is known as Orong Co in Tibetan. The ancient lake was formed by glaciers.

2. Glaciers in autumn.

1. Joseph Rock once stopped to rest here when he explored Daocheng years ago.

2. Mount Shenrezig, which is covered with snow throughout the year, resembles a reclining Buddha holding a huge stupa.

caterpillar fungi. We met a couple with a little child who said they made a circuit around the peak every day. I would not have believed them, but watching them quickly disappear ahead of us, I realized they were seasoned veterans! June seemed to be the best time for the fungi hunters. They could sell freshly dug caterpillar fungi for more than 10 yuan a piece. This was expensive, but most tourists usually had no idea of the market price. But the digging of caterpillar fungi damages the mountain vegetation.

By 11 am, we were hungry and needed to recover our strength, so we ate up the rest of our snacks. At this moment, a Tibeta circling the peak alone sat down to chat with us. At first, we worried about his intentions as he seemed a little too enthusiastic. He offered to carry my bag, but I declined. Then he offered to show us the way. With him along, the trip became smooth and easy. He said he circled the peak once a year and after every trip he felt more at ease in his heart.

I can't remember how many narrow mountain passes we went through. Every time we reached a new one, I panted and struggled. But just as I was about to throw up my hands in despair, that kind brother encouraged me. His words would momentarily boost my morale, until the next slope appeared.

By about 1 pm, my psychological defences were close to breaking down. Jean had long been out of sight, and I now confronted a massive slope heaped with broken stones and rocks. There was nothing to indicate how high we were, but previous experience told me we must be above 5,000 metres, for I had no strength left at all and wanted to collapse and fall sleep after every three steps. I had never felt so weak before, so I understood the seriousness of the situation.

Deep in my heart I now hoped that our companion would once again offer to help carry my bag. As if he had heard my silent plea, the Tibetan reached out for my backpack, while I continued to carry my camera and a canteen. But the situation did not improve; I still needed to stop for a one-minute rest after every three steps (I counted them carefully) and drink some water before moving forward again. Incredibly, it took me 20 minutes to cover what should have been a short, easy path. Our patient companion stayed with me throughout, expressions of sympathy and care on his face.

Thanks to his encouragement, I reached the route's highest summit, passing the top of the peak where long, narrow flags bearing Buddhist inscriptions danced and flapped in the wind. It was all downhill after that, in the best way possible! I

suddenly flew along the path, as if I had been charged with electricity, leaving Jean far behind.

Soon we were crossing other summits covered in rhododendrons until we finally reached the far side of the mountain nearest to Shenrezig. I happily posed for a picture with my kind Tibetan helper and then followed him along a shortcut. At exactly 3 pm, we were back at the Chonggu Monastery. Before we left, I offered my new friend a tip for his help, but he refused it. I was deeply moved.

Helping Hands All the Way

Now all we had to do was walk from the monastery to the parking lot. Once again Jean was off and running, deciding to go on ahead to the parking lot to check in with the driver first. Perhaps because of something in his character, he always walked ahead of me. When travelling with others, you must be prepared to adapt to their rhythms and personalities.

Back at the station hotel, we counted out our money: Jean had just over 10 yuan, while I had only HKD$500. Subtracting 40 yuan for that night's accommodation and dinner and some food for the long coach trip to Kangding, we didn't actually have enough for our coach tickets (120 yuan each). In the most forceful tone I could muster, I told the booking clerk: "I only have Hong Kong dollars, so if you cannot accept that, I cannot pay you. We know we can find a bank in Kangding and convert the money there, or take out more cash." The clerk wasn't sure what to do, but she said if the driver agreed, it was fine with her. We were lucky. After we boarded the coach the next day, a Tibetan traveller offered to convert our Hong Kong dollars just as we were explaining our situation to the distressed driver. That saved us indeed, but the cost of the fares left us with little to spare. Never before had money been such a concern in my life!

It Never Rains but It Pours!

It took 12 hours for our coach to reach Kangding, and we didn't arrive at the plateau's most prosperous town until 6 pm. Our first task was to find lodging at a hotel opposite the station. After carrying our luggage up and down the stairs to haggle over a 5-yuan difference in rooms, we finally secured two rooms with baths for 15 yuan!

Circumstances forced our hand. Without ready cash, we could not afford to be lax about expenses. If anything unexpected happened, we would have to rely on the remaining money to pay for our fares back to Chengdu. It was a one-day trip from Kangding to Chengdu, with a single ticket costing more than 100 yuan. It was too terrible to think about anything going wrong.

After dropping our luggage, we immediately went out to look for an ATM. There were many banks in Kangding, but the best-laid plans rarely come off without a hitch. It turned out that all the banks' ATM services were suspended over the next 10 days for a network update!! We could not believe our bad timing.

I could just imagine how Jean felt. It was a difficult night, and I had nightmares. The next morning, Jean went to a bank early in an attempt to get some cash through his credit card. Unfortunately, none of the clerks spoke English, and they would not accept a foreign card. Returning to the hotel empty handed, we immediately checked out and caught a regular bus to Chengdu.

Free at Last!

Another 12-hour journey by long distance bus, but this time the destination was more promising. We felt sure that all our problems would be solved in Chengdu. Jean and I were so confident that we treated ourselves to a luxurious meal when we stopped along the way for lunch.

We pulled into Chengdu at 6.30 pm. With no money for a hotel, I waited while Jean went to find an ATM. I was never worried that he might cheat me — it would have been too cruel and broken a code among fellow travellers.

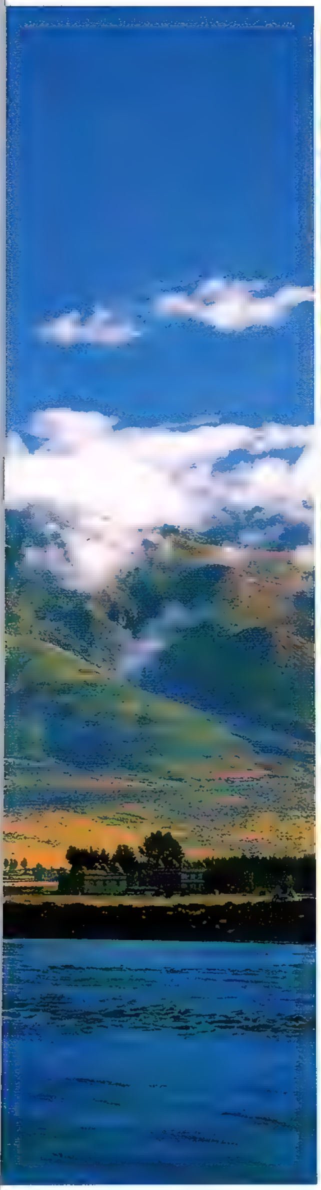
But half an hour later, Jean returned, his expression more disappointed than ever. As I sat there looking puzzled, he began to laugh and returned the money I had loaned him. Before I left for Hong Kong, he took me out for dinner.

Jean continued travelling, to the Three Gorges, Hunan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Shanghai, Beijing, Inner Mongolia and beyond.

Translated by Huang Deyuan

1. A river in Daocheng.
2. A lovely stream.
3. Villagers toiling in the fields.

Overleaf: Ancient glacier caps in Daocheng.

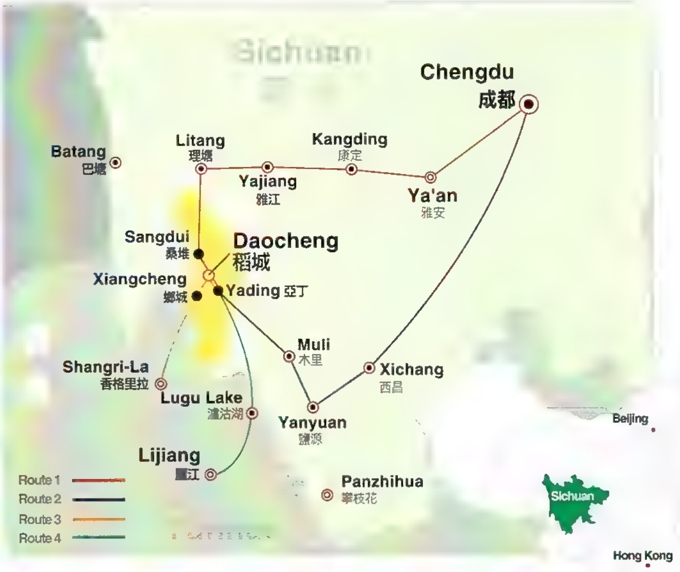


Postscript: This may not be the travelogue you were expecting, but it is an accurate record of my journey. I don't mean to alarm anyone thinking of making the same trip, but at the same time I do want to be truthful...at times I was very worried. The most important thing for any journey is to take things as they come and stay flexible, rather than rigidly sticking to a certain goal or plan. Unexpected events, both positive and negative, will make your trip more interesting. There is rarely a completely good or bad journey; what counts are the memories.

Four Routes to **Daocheng**

Photos & Text • Dianna Lau

Mount Shenrezig in late autumn. (by Lu Linglong)



SICHUAN

Route 1 Chengdu → Kangding → Daocheng → Yading Scenic Area (Duration: 2 days)

Chengdu (by public bus which departs in the morning and arrives in the afternoon, fare: 105 yuan; duration: around 6.5 hours) →
Kangding (overnight stay; by bus, fare: 124 yuan; duration: 12 hours) →
Daocheng (overnight stay; by jeep, cost: 50 yuan/ person; duration: 4hours) →
Yading Scenic Area

Pros: Easy trip, reliable and time-saving transport, relatively cheaper. For first-timers to highland, spending the first night at Kangding (2,560 metres) can let the body adjust, you can choose the length of your stay until you feel confident about going to Daocheng located at 3,740 metres above sea level. Kangding is the capital of Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, where facilities and transport are more convenient. Even if you feel unwell at Daocheng, buses back to Kangding are easy to find.

Cons: This route focuses on Daocheng and Yading Scenic Area, but miss out many natural wonders along the way.

Flights:

There are daily flights from Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou to Chengdu of Sichuan Province. One-way airfare for reference: Around HK$1,820, 990 yuan (discounts of up to 40% sometimes offered during Chinese off-peak season). Duration: 2.5 hours.

Local Accommodation:

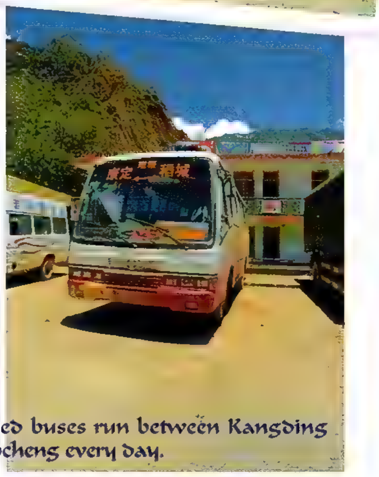
Chengdu — Jiaotong Hotel' is recommended: No. 77 Linjiang Rd, Tel: (28) 8545 1017, board: 40 ~ 100 yuan (large room/ person — discount double room, shared bathroom), the hotel is right next to the Xinnanmen Bus Terminal, very handy for taking buses to western Sichuan.

Kangding — There are numerous guesthouses opposite the station, owners usually tout for business at the station, check out the different prices for different floors before hauling your luggage up, because the altitude makes climbing stairs and lifting bags quite a slog! Lodge: 15 ~ 80 yuan (large room or double-bed room, shared bathroom).

Daocheng —Jiaotong Hotel at the station is recommended, board: 15 ~ 40 yuan (triple or double room, latter has bathroom).

Yading Scenic Area —There are small hotels at the entrance, lodge: 20 ~ 25 yuan/ person; within the scenic area the two options are: Chonggu Temple and military tents at Luorong Pastures, the former starts at 20 yuan, while the latter costs 50 yuan. Camping or fires are not allowed within the scenic area.

There are many guesthouses opposite Kangding bus station. Don't forget to bargain!



Scheduled buses run between Kangding and Daocheng every day.

Route 2

Chengdu → Xichang → Muli → Daocheng Yading Scenic Area (Duration: 7 days)

Chengdu (train fare: around 150 yuan, duration: 12 hours) → Xichang (stay overnight; bus fare: 50 yuan) → Muli County Seat (no buses, must charter jeeps) → Luodou Village in Shuiluo Township (hire mule and guide, cost: 100 ~ 120 yuan/ day, duration: 4 days; some parts must be trekked on foot) → Daocheng Yading Scenic Area

Pros: Enjoy the breathtaking sights of the three mountains from different angles, retrace the steps of Luoke in search of the ancient kingdom of Muli; be rewarded with picture-perfect scenery of snowy peaks, rolling pastures, shimmering lakes and the dazzling Baishui River.

Cons: Complicated transport arrangements, first you must get to Chengdu, then to Xichang and Muli. Visitor needs a good level of fitness and outdoor training, the altitude ranges from 2,700 metres at the starting point Shuiluo Township to Yading Scenic Area's 4,200 metres.

Appreciate the sacred mountain from several angles.

Flights:

There are daily flights from Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou to Chengdu of Sichuan Province. One-way airfare for reference: Around HK$1,820, 990 yuan (discounts of up to 40% sometimes offered during Chinese off-peak season). Duration: 2.5 hours.

Local Accommodation:

Chengdu — same as Route 1   Xichang — many hotels, 15 ~ 80 yuan/ person/ room
Muli County Seat — County Government Guesthouse, 15 ~ 30 yuan/ person/ room
Luodou Village in Shuiluo Township — local lodgings, 20 yuan/ person
Yading Scenic Area — same as Route 1

A local Tibetan digs for caterpillar fungi.

YUNNAN

Route 3

Lijiang → Lugu Lake → Daocheng Yading Scenic Area (Duration: 8 -11 days)

Lijiang (bus fare: 46.5 yuan; duration: 7 hours) →
Lugu Lake (hire a motorbike to the hot springs village of Walabie, hire mules with guide roughly 150 yuan/ day, contact Ms. Yang: (888) 586 1293. The journey to Yading can be done in two ways — the eastern route takes around 11 days while the western route takes 7 days) → Daocheng Yading Scenic Area

Pros: This route has stunning views all the way through, you'd be able to experience the local customs of Naxi, Mosuo and Tibetan people. The eastern route has better scenery than the western route, but doesn't go through Kasi Valley, which the western route offers.

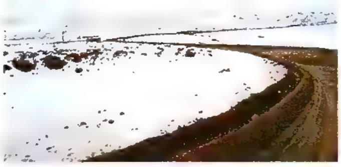
Cons: The trip is relatively long, the visitor has to get to Lijiang first. To go further, one must have physical stamina and outdoor experience. The range of altitude from starting point Lijiang to Yading Scenic Area is around 2,400 ~ 4,700 metres.

Flights:

There are flights to Lijiang from Shenzhen and Guangzhou (stops in Kunming), airfare: 1,500 yuan (20% discount available in off-peak season), flight takes around 3.5 hours.

Local Accommodation:

Lijiang — Huge number of local guesthouses, board: 20 ~ 200 yuan/ single or double room).
Lugu Lake/ Hot Springs Walabie Village — No shortage of guesthouses, lodging: from 20 yuan/ bed.
Yading Scenic Area — same as Route 1


A sudden snowfall en route!

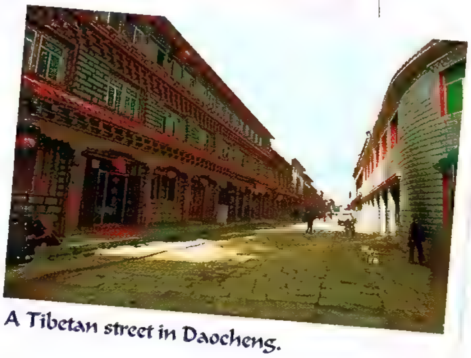
Route 4

Shangri-La → Daocheng → Yading Scenic Area (Duration: 2 days)

Shangri-la (bus, fare: 98 yuan; duration: 11 hours) →
Daocheng (jeep, fare: 50 yuan/ person; duration: 4 hours) → Yading Scenic Area

Pros: Get to experience two different "Shangri-La's"; buses are reliable, fast and comfortable.

Cons: must get to Shangri-La in Yunnan first, takes longer and costs more; another thing is the altitude at Shangri-La — at 3,282 metres, not everyone's comfort level.


A Tibetan street in Daocheng.

Flights:

There are flights to Shangri-La from Kunming and Guangzhou, airfares are 700 yuan, 1,590 yuan, flights take 50 minutes and 2.5 hours respectively. Another way is to take a bus from Lijiang to Shangri-La, bus fare: 30 yuan; duration: 5 hours.

Local Accommodation:

Shangri-la — Haba Snowy Mountain Hotel across from the bus station is recommended, you only have to pay 30 yuan for a clean and bright double-bed room, this ensures you don't miss your bus — even if it departs early in the morning.
Daocheng — same as Route 1   Yading Scenic Area — same as Route 1

Touring **Yading** in 2 Days 1 Night

Photos & Text • Dianna Lau

Reporter diary: June 1 and 2, 2006 (two days, one night)

Itinerary

Day 1 (entrance of Yading Scenic Area — Luorong Pasture):

Yading Scenic Area car park (with accommodation, unbeatable views of the snow-capped mountains!) ⟶ Chonggu Temple (cabins available for lodging) ⟶ Pearl Lake (Tibetan name: Drolma Laco) ⟶ Luorong Pasture (large tents available for staying overnight).

Day Two (circling Xiannairi Sacred Mountain — entrance of scenic area):

Luorong Pasture ⟶ Milk Sea (Tibetan name: Orong Co); because of time constraints, couldn't spare one more hour to visit Five-Colour Lake (Tibetan name: Tenzin Co) ⟶ pass ⟶ summit ⟶ descend and return to Chonggu Temple (pass through Pearl Lake) ⟶ car park

Touring

Trekking is the only way to tour the whole scenic area. The first day may require 8 hours to finish trekking, and the second day 10 hours.

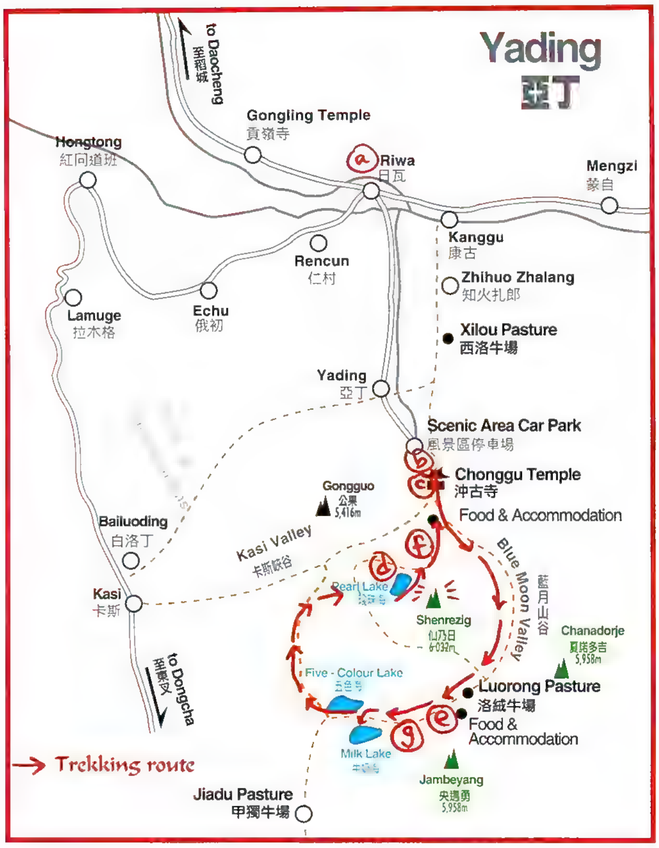
Tips: Those with limited fitness but are financially strong can pay for horse-riding. Most of the journey can be completed by following instruction signs, but for the mountain-circling pilgrimage visitors are suggested finding a local guide (may ask Tibetans at your lodging place to coordinate). With locals who know the way then you won't get lost en routh. Don't spoil your trip by trying to save money, the priority should be finishing the journey safely. If by following the pilgrims, you may save costs for hiring a local guide, but bear in mind that the local Tibetans walk briskly, it's very likely you won't be able to catch up.

Companions

1~3 people (I met a French student at Daocheng bus station, our "team" also added a friendly and helpful Tibetan while circling the mountain.)

Equipments

35L backpack, weighing around 5 kilograms, including: Nikon-D100 digital camera with two lenses (14mm wide-angle lens and 28~70mm zoom lens), two camera batteries (enough for two days without recharging facilities), down sleeping bag (suitable for -5°C), torch (purchased in the county seat, 8 yuan with batteries, super value!), 750ml water bottle (too small, double the size would be good, but mind the weight), some snacks (chocolates, candies, biscuits), very limited cash, I only had a hundred-more Renminbi and HK$500 which couldn't be exchanged at the county seat bank! (What a shame I couldn't stay longer because of the shortage of money!!)


Yading
亞丁
to Daocheng
至稻城
Gongling Temple
貢嶺寺
Hongtong
紅同道班
a
Riwa
日瓦
Mengzi
蒙自
Kanggu
康古
Rencun
仁村
Zhihuo Zhalang
知火扎郎
Lamuge
拉木格
Echu
俄初
Xilou Pasture
西洛牛場
Yading
亞丁
Scenic Area Car Park
風景區停車場
b
c
Chonggu Temple
沖古寺
Food & Accommodation
Gongguo
公果
5,416m
Bailuoding
白洛丁
Kasi Valley
卡斯峽谷
f
d
Pearl Lake
珍珠海
Shenrezig
仙乃日
6,032m
Blue Moon Valley
藍月山谷
Kasi
卡斯
Chanadorje
夏諾多吉
5,958m
Five - Colour Lake
五色海
Luorong Pasture
洛絨牛場
e
g
Food & Accommodation
to Dongcha
至東仗
Milk Lake
牛奶海
Trekking route
Jambeyang
央邁勇
5,958m
Jiadu Pasture
甲獨牛場

a. Stopping to take photos at Mount Shenrezig and Yading Village.

b. The start of our hike.

c. Unique Mani piles in Daocheng.

Expenditures

Leave Luggage:

Leave large bags at the hotel. The writer deposited luggage at the Station Hotel, which each piece costs 5 yuan/day.

Jeep:

There are no tourist buses from Daocheng County to the scenic area, but every day there are jeep drivers touting for business at the station, hotels and on the street, individual travelers don't have to charter the vehicle. One way trip to the scenic area costs 50 yuan/ person, timing is up to you (our car left at 05:30 in the morning), usually return is at four in the afternoon; you must advise the driver if you're not returning on the day and reserve your seat.

Food & Accommodation:

Yading Village (about 5 minutes drive from the scenic area car park): Many Tibetan residences provide food and accommodation, cost well under a hundred Yuan per night.

Car park at the entrance of Yading Scenic Area (Nongtong Dam): Yalong Lodge next to the car park has rooms with glorious vistas of the snowy mountains, large room 20 yuan/ person.double room 25 yuan/ person, meals offered: vegetarian dishes cost 10 yuan each, meat dishes start at 15 yuan each, soup from 10 yuan, rice 2 yuan/ person, drinks from 5 yuan.

Within the scenic area: lodging only at Chonggu Temple and Luorong Pasture, with basic facilities, so sleeping bags are a must! The former offers cabins (20~30 yuan/ bed), the latter has military tents (50 yuan/ bed), food is sold at both places, budget at least 20 yuan/ person for each meal.

Tips: Camping and fires are strictly prohibited within the scenic area! During peak seasons (Labour Day on May 1, National Day on October 1, autumn months of September and October) there is likely a shortage of accommodation, be prepared to stay by the fire all night, if worse comes to worst.

Admissions:

Ticket booth for Yading Scenic Area is at Riwa Township: Adults 150 yuan; Students and seniors 80 yuan (a disc of the scenery is given together with an entry ticket!)

Hiring Mules:

Car park (Nongtong Dam) → Chonggu Temple: 40 yuan (one way)/ 70 yuan (return)

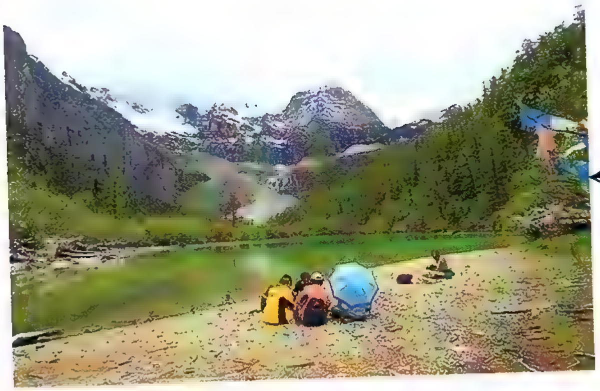
Chonggu Temple → Luorong Pasture: 100 yuan (one way)/ 180 yuan (return)

Tips: The path for circling the mountain begins at Luorong Pasture, it is winding and not suitable for horse-riding, besides, mountain-circling is a sacred journey that should be made on foot.

Local Guides:

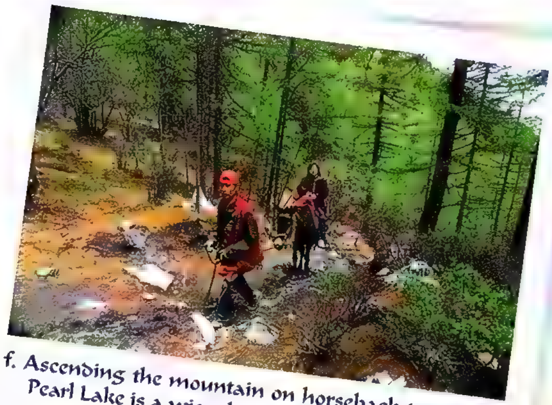
Usually there is no need for a guide because the route from entrance to Luorong Pasture has clear signs. Mountain-circling Xiannairi (one day) or a longer mountain-circling pilgrimage to the three major sacred mountains (around 3 days). It's best to hire local villagers as guides, negotiate a price in person. When we went mountain-circling it was off-peak season and we chatted with lots of Tibetans digging for caterpillar fungus — a rare herb for Chinese medicine, they were only asking 10 yuan for guide services on the shorter journey.

Tips: Don't rely too much on the signboards for place names, some are in Chinese, some are in Tibetan, for example, Pearl Lake is also named Drolma Laco, it's best to use the map coordinates for reference. Also, the altitudes and estimated walking time on the signs are not too accurate and should be used as reference only.



d. Sharing a meal beneath Mount Shenrezig - cool!

e. Room for improvement in the military-style tent - 50 yuan/bed.

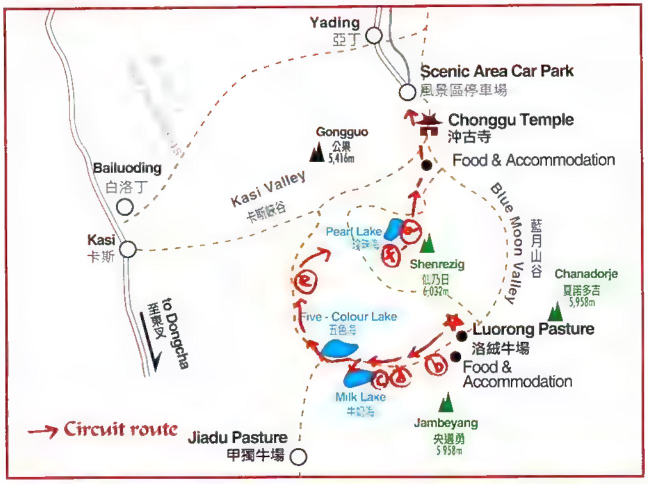


f. Ascending the mountain on horseback to visit Pearl Lake is a wise choice.

g. Bring a map to help you find your way.

Around Mt Shenrezig for 10 hours

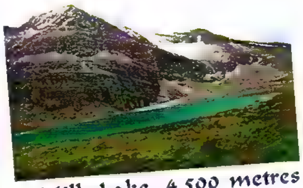
Luorong Pasture → Milk Lake (Orong Co) → via Five-Colour Lake (Tenzin Co) → via Kasi Valley → Pearl Lake (Drolma Laco) → Chonggu Temple → car park


Yading
亞丁
Scenic Area Car Park
風景區停車場
Chonggu Temple
沖古寺
Food & Accommodation
Gongguo
公果
5,416m
Bailuoding
白洛丁
Kasi Valley
卡斯峽谷
Kasi
卡斯
Blue Moon Valley
藍月山谷
Pearl Lake
珍珠海
Shenrezig
仙乃日
6,032m
Chanadorje
夏諾多吉
5,958m
Five - Colour Lake
五色海
Luorong Pasture
洛絨牛場
Food & Accommodation
to Dongcha
至東义
Milk Lake
牛奶海
Jambeyang
央邁勇
5,958m
Circuit route
Jiadu Pasture
甲獨牛場
a
b
c
d
e
f
g

a. Trekking through azalea-lined trails is fun!

Time/Activity	Location	Altitude	Process	Experience
5:50 a.m./ woke up and shoot the sunset	Luorong Pasture: Just outside our tent we'd be able to shoot the glorious golden sunrise at Shenrezig and Jambeyang sacred mountains; middle of the hill was a great spot — it faced to Jambeyang; whereas at Chonggu Temple we could capture the other side of the sunset. If you want different angles, you may have to put in a longer stay.	3,780 metres	The sunset was fleeting and you should leave at least half an hour in waiting time. Don't stay in one spot — a few steps away could make a totally different shot.	b. The peak peeks out from the clouds for a moment.
6:30 a.m./ start mountain-circling	The small wooden bridge next to Luorong Pasture was the starting point for mountain-circling.	3,780 metres +	After the bridge was a broad expanse of pasture facing the Jambeyang Sacred Mountain.	Spent too long photographing the sunset outside the tent, missed out on this superior spot.
7:00 a.m.	Looked up at Jambeyang from mid-hill.	4,100 metres	Tree lined paths going downhill.	Easy to walk.
7:30 a.m.	Followed the rainbow coloured sutra streamers upward.	4,100 metres +	Clearly marked stone paths.	Started huffing.
8:00 a.m.	Arrived at the road sign on the summit.	4,500 metres	Windy, but the path was flatter.	Signs in Tibetan nearly mislead us to the wrong direction to Milk Lake, thankfully some Tibetans were around to give us directions.
8:30 a.m.	Arrived at Milk Lake (Tibetan name: Orong Co).	4,500 metres	Emerald coloured lake, and in front of us we could easily see the glaciers that are said to radiate green light.	Stunning!
9:20 a.m.	Just missed visiting Five-Colour Lake (Tibetan name: Tenzin Co).	4,600 metres	Saw no signs to Five-Coloured Lake along the way, by the time locals told us, we had missed the path there, it would take another hour for the return journey, gave up due to time constraints.	Started feeling tired.
10:00 a.m.	Unknown lake.	4,600 metres +	The beautiful lake is at the bottom of the valley, with mountain paths on both sides. The shorter mountain-circling route involves a gradual climb on the right side; while the path on the left is the one for a longer route (take the correct path!)	When clouds of mist moved in from the valley, it was a heavenly sight.

10:45 a.m.	Reached sutra steamers at a high point. Started descending after rest.	4,700 metres	Had breakfast; met a Tibetan also on the mountain-circling pilgrimage who was nice enough to guide us (for free!)	Feel more energetic after breakfast, but still huffing and puffing!
11:40 a.m.	Arrived at stone houses, said to be temporary lodgings for the Tibetans digging for precious caterpillar fungus.	4,600 metres	Wild azaleas are in full bloom for as far as the eye could see.	Sweeping views, undemanding trek.
12:30 p.m.	Uphill, stony paths extended slowly upwards.	4,750 metres +	Had thought where the sutra streamers were was the highest pass, not knowing the hardest part was yet to come.	Exhausting! The backpack felt heavy and I got extremely thirsty!!
13:00 p.m.	Finally got a glimpse of the highest point in this journey.	4,800 metres +	The path wasn't difficult at all, others gathered speed while I was losing energy, there was no choice but to persevere!	Felt helpless and weak!
13:15 p.m.	Summit in sight!	4,800 metres +	Our Tibetan friend asked again if I needed help with my backpack, I decided to drop pretenses and thanked him for doing me a favour.	Had to rest every few steps.
13:25 p.m.	Highest point of the mountain-circling!	4,900 metres??	Unsure about exact altitude, but one thing was for sure — I'd never felt so exhausted!	Mixed feelings!
13:30 p.m.	Passrf the highest point of the mountain-circling!	4,900 metres?	The top was full of branches left behind by mountain-circling pilgrims, colourful sutra streamers waving in the breeze.	It's all downhill from here!!
14:00 p.m.	More azaleas.	4,800 metres	Got my backpack from the Tibetan and made an easy descent.	Fatigue disappeared.
14:15 p.m.	Arrivef at the closest spot to the Shenrezig.	4,500 metres	Photo-shooting	What a thrill!
14:45 p.m.	Passed Pearl Lake (Tibetan name: Drolma Laco) which was next to Chonggu Temple.	4,100 metres	Fortunately we were guided by Tibetans and the shortcuts saved lots of time.	Rapid descent. Cool!
15:00 p.m.	Passed Chonggu Temple.	3,900 metres	After crossing the wooded area we returned to flat paths, fellow trekkers went to car park first to meet driver.	I walked faster and faster!
15:50 p.m.	Returned to car park to meet with driver.	3,900 metres	Strolled along the last part.	Still exhilarated!!



c. Milk Lake, 4,500 metres above sea level.

e. We're almost there!

d. A sea of sutra streamers.

f. A pasture near Mount Shenrezig.

He is a wolf —
a westbound wolf roaming on the western plateaus;
He lives in the mountains and forests in
West China all the year round,
almost cut off from the rest of the world.
The result is to produce stunningly beautiful pictures
and finding one after scenic areas that have
amazed the whole world.
He is called Lu Linglong.

A Westbound Wolf

Photos · Lu Linglong Article · Huang Yanhong

Lu Linglong is a heavy bearded man with a tender Chinese name — the given name of "Ling Long" (玲瓏) in Chinese actually means beautiful body shape of a woman. His name has been known to me for some 20 years, yet we seldom met.

He once served in the army, and worked as a photographer in a water conservancy research institute, which was regarded as an "iron rice bowl" by many. In the early 1980s, he became well-known in Sichuan's photographic circles. Besides taking pictures, he is also a social activist, organizing exhibitions and even a 25,000-km photographic inspection tour on motorbike, something heroic enough to cause a sensation for a time.

2

How to Survive in an Undeveloped Area

After the inspection tour, Lu Linglong began to phase out from public life. He broke his "iron rice bowl" by resigning from his job, and went to Tibet alone. He stayed in Garzê County for about eight years, living in his student's home. It was at that time he found the truth: the poorer you are, the easier it is to survive in an undeveloped area. The local Tibetans are very hospitable, not charging him anything for his board and room, and they would be angry if he did pay. Of course, being a poor man he could take very limited pictures, only one piece for most of the places.

Lu told me that now he is still a poor man — living at his mother's house for he has no apartment of his own, and could not afford a TV set until 1998.

In his long explorations as a photographer, he covered almost everywhere in Tibet, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan. He said proudly, "I'm no longer a photographer; I would rather be an explorer to find out the deeper meaning in the west's geography and humanistic legacy. Many a men have been to the west — geologists went to find mineral resources; anthropologists went to find things related to the human being, none of them have grasped the whole system. I enjoy my every trip to the west, because the pure natural world there goes well with my spiritual world where I can form a means of expression of my own; I must develop it to the full. So I have to leave the city and go to the west from time to time. I wish to reach the acme of artistic attainment and to contribute to the history of human civilization. I will pave the way with my life to this end."

Dancing with the Wolf

Lu Linglong told me that he was also regarded as a wolf by some people and he agrees with them. He seems to be born with a wolf mentality as he "seeks after a wolf's acuteness, tries to adapt to a wolf's environment and to experience a wolf's skill for survival. " This man who identifies with a wolf did have the experience of "dancing with the wolf" in his long trips.

Once while driving in the desert he was surrounded and chased by a pack of hungry wolves. In haste he sped up and threw the dried meat and bread to the wolves. In the dusts of sand the howling wolves could be heard all the way and it was not until he threw up all the food in the car and drove dozens of kilometres away was he able to get away from the wolves.

A more dangerous occasion came when he was so intoxicated by the magnificent scenery of the sunset and the excitement of taking pictures that he forgot everything around him. A wolf was approaching him quietly from behind. He looked back at the sound and thought it was just a wild dog. When he came to realize what it was, the wolf was already very close. There was no time to escape, and he had no gun with him. In the emergency he held up the camera lens at hand that looked like a cannon. Frightened by it, the wolf retreated a few steps. The two of them faced each other; when he moved forward the animal retreated, and when the wolf advanced, he moved backward. After an hour or so of such a confrontation, the wolf left sulkily.

He also told me a true story with a strong human touch about him and wolf. It was in the no-man's region in northern Tibet, where wolves are a common sight. "The wolf came, looking at me from a distance. Then it got nearer and nearer, 150 metres, then 100, then 50, keeping its eyes on me with every step forward. Its eyes looked very kind, not at all harmful. So I met his eye bravely, and began to talk to him slowly. Later all his family came, who kept looking at me like this. In the next few years I made a yearly trip there and each time I was there, they would come to see me, standing there silently before leaving me alone. The last time I saw the wolf, it was by himself, with one of his legs broken." Lu looked sad at the story, for the wolf that wanted to be friendly with the human beings... incredible indeed to the eyes of ordinary people.

Never to Touch Shotgun Again

Lu Linglong explained that it was between 1970s and 1980s when people had very vague idea of animal and environmental protection. Sometimes to keep safe or to find something to eat, and of course, to have some fun, photographers would organize hunting trips. But one incident happened which has totally changed his habit.

One day a few photographers including Lu went

1. Lu Linglong loves to go to take pictures deep in the mountains or out in the wilderness all by himself.

2. He feels like a duck to water each time he steps on the plateau to live with the Tibetans.

3. The spiritual world Lu wants to share with people lies in the tranquility of Nature.

3

1. After vowing to give up hunting, Lu finds wild animals his best companions.

2. Staying in an icy cave to take pictures, Lu could survive there like a wolf.

to take photos in the river valley in Ngari in western Tibet. Suddenly they spotted a large herd of wild sheep. Excited at the find they drove at a full speed to chase them. When they were really close to the sheep, Lu raised his gun and fired three shots in a run. Usually there must be some animals falling down right after his shots. But this time the wild sheep were still running desperately, leaving only a long trace of blood. They followed the blood and drove for another 50 km before seeing three wounded sheep falling down one after another. It turned out that the wounded ones were supported and carried by hundreds of their fellow mates as they stayed real close to each other until the three breathed their last. Otherwise, even if they had to run to the end of the world, the wild sheep would never leave their mates uncared for.

The sad sheep were still running for their lives desperately in the wilderness. Lu Linglong stood there traumatized. Looking at the dust fading into the distance, a deep agony cut into his heart. The sight before his eyes shocked him so much that from then on he vowed never to touch the gun again except for self-defense.

Hoping to Have a "Green Bank"

As we talked, I felt that he was still living in the past, in the years when the sunlight warmed one's heart despite a shortage of material supplies. He is not so happy with the world today. He said that in people's pursuit of explorations the relationship between man and nature was upside down. Man's climb on Qomolangma was extolled to the sky, but the mount has been standing high there for hundreds of millions of years. Man should pay more respect to, take care of and protect the Nature, instead of conquering it.

I felt the same way. Today explorations have all become stereotyped: after climbing over a mountain or covering a no-man's zone or wetland, people would hold up the sponsor's brand, posing like heroes, then be described as a conqueror in endless reports. It's a shame that such superficiality should have become a vogue today.

Landscape photos in the past mostly reflected the photographers intoxication with the beautiful sceneries, said Lu Linglong, but he hopes that urban residents today can learn something from them. He told the Tibetans that they should leave behind them a "green bank" — ecology and humanity — the priceless legacies that can't be produced again. If it is well-preserved, later generations can always draw "interests" from the "green bank;" if not, their posterity could only walk on barren desert.

Translated by L. Yu

Chronological Table of Lu Linglong's Photographic Art

Early 1980s Lu Linglong held several one-man photographic exhibitions and co-published with photographer friends picture albums including *Tibet, The Four-Maiden Mountain, Jiuzhaigou.*

1986 He joined the comprehensive inspection and filming trip *25,000 Kilometres Across China,* which made him attached to the photographic art and prompted him to become a professional photographer.

1995 He went to Daocheng County in Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan and found Shangri-La — a place that had remained a mystery for over 50 years. His picture album *Daocheng* has greatly promoted tourism in the county.

1997 He completed the feat of walking through the Yarlung Zangbo Great Canyon, the largest canyon in the world, and published in 1998 his picture album *Namjagbarwa Great Canyon* (later named by the State Council as the *Yarlung Zangbo Great Canyon*).

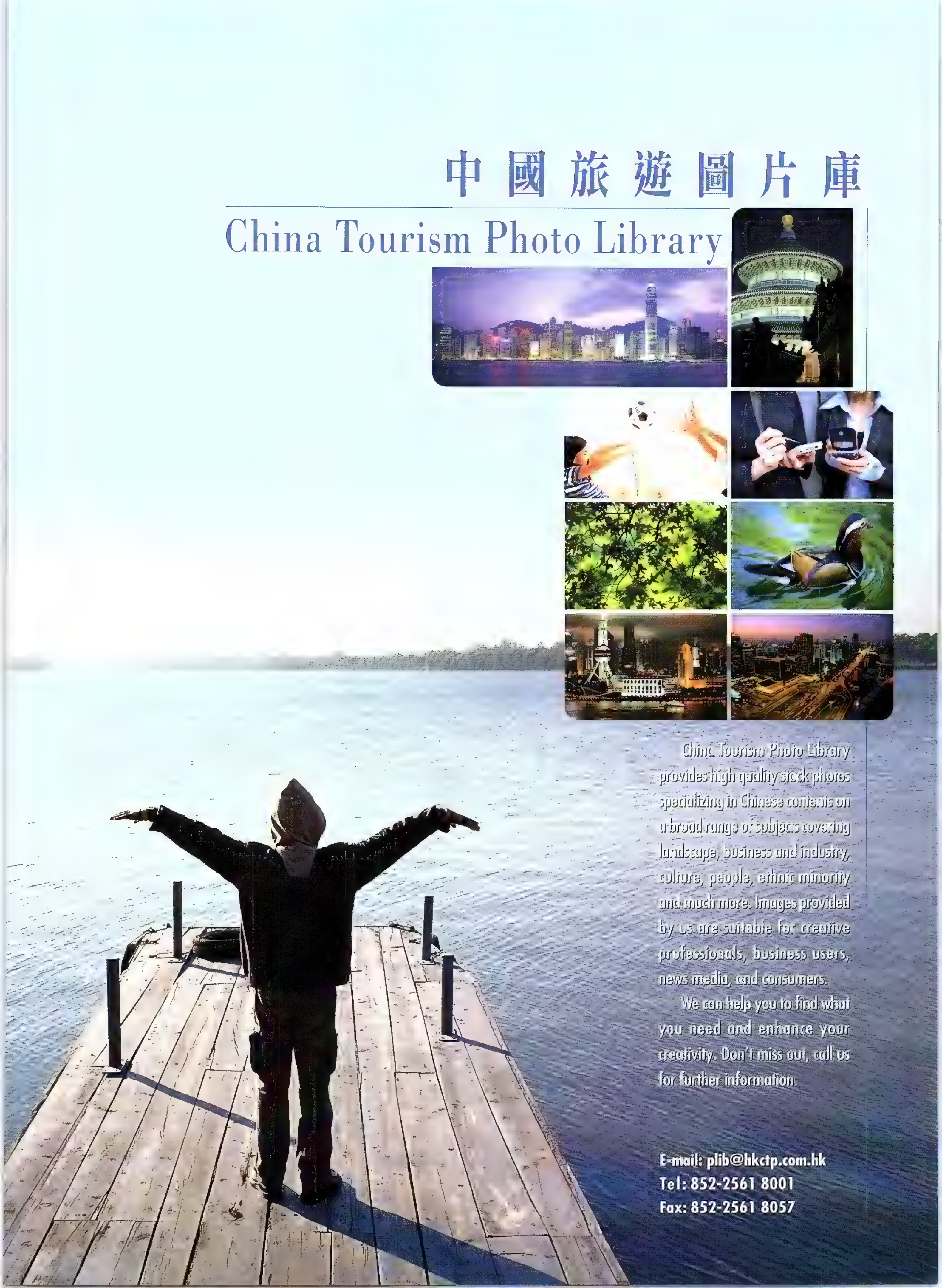
2000 He found great tourist potential in the natural scenery of the Sun Valley in Derong County bordering Sichuan and Yunnan. The publication of his picture album *Derong — Sun Valley in China's West* made this tucked away place a hot tourist destination overnight.

2001 He shot in Shiqu County, Sichuan, a place where the borderlines of Sichuan, Qinghai and Tibet meet. His work *Shiqu-Tribes Closest to the Sun in Western China* displays the customs and culture of the grassland.

2002 He spent a year shooting in Maoxian County, Ngapa Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan. His pictures were published in the hard-cover album *Divine Mount Jiuding — Light of Civilization of Ancient Qiang Chinese.*

2003 His second large hardcover album *Holy Land of Yading · Daocheng — The Last Pure Land on Earth* was published.

2004 He was invited to be a guest professor of the Southwest University for Nationalities.



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Wolf! Wolf!

Photos • Chen Shenggui   Article • Chen Hongxin

To the younger generation, the only contact with a wolf may be to see one locked in a cage in a zoo. Indeed, even those from older generations have seldom glimpsed one in the wild. However, with the increase in consciousness of environmental protection, traces of these wild animals are appearing again.

1. Having wolves on the prairie creates a balance of species as the wolves rely on other animals like beavers, marmots, boars and hares as their food source. This keeps the food chain in balance.

2. The captured wolf shows no fear and remains ferocious.

3. Wolves and vultures scavenging on the carcass of a calf.

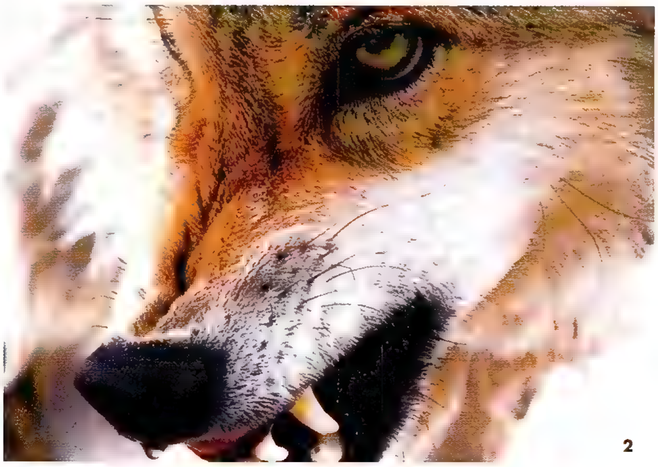
Wolves on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau

In the 1950s, I got to hear the howling of wolves outside the Xingqing Palace near the city of Xi'an, capital city of Shaanxi Province. Shortly after, on all the farms in China, a misguided campaign of "striking the wolves" was launched. Whenever a wolf was spotted, people would kill it. It did not take long to result in the near elimination of this carnivore — except in the no-man's land of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. With growing ecological concern in China this species is recovering and their howl is now heard more frequently. And because of this I had the chance at last to encounter wild wolves. In June 2004, I was heading to the West on Tang Fan Ancient Pathway and reached the great river dam of Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province. It was around eight in the morning when a grey "dog" suddenly appeared, leisurely crossing the highway. It looked neither back nor sideways. Instead, it was like a landlord taking a walk in its own territory. When I took a closer look at its broom-like long tail, I realized it was indeed a wolf. That was my first time to see a wild wolf. Three days later, in the mountains close to Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, another wolf gave me a penetrating stare and then walked continuously uphill until it disappeared, without casting another glance at me.

Encounter Between Man and Wolves

Last July, I met my old friend Chen Shenggui in Haixi Mongo-Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Qinghai Province. Chen is an officer of the prefecture's travel bureau. A veteran photographer of wildlife, he told me that he has zealously taken pictures of wolves whenever they appear. He told me "last October, we went to Wild Ox Valley (Ye Niu Gou), at first, we saw hundreds of yaks and about 20 bold eagles fighting over a small calf. While totally immersed in taking the pictures, five wolves appeared out of the blue in front of our lens. Being shocked, the vultures soared high and darted down at full speed to attack the uninvited guests. The wolves jumped and dashed here and there to avoid the attacks. Every now and then they even counter-attacked the eagles although they were obviously losing. They, however, were not willing to give up the feast. When the wolves learnt that our cars were gradually moving closer to them, they began to leave with only one of them still fighting with the vultures. The lone wolf finally left unwillingly as our cars approached within 30 metres of it. We could tell from the stare of the wolf how disappointed and frustrated it was."

Chen also told us how, in the recent spring, a family of Mongolian nomads had caught a wolf that was trying to break into their sheep pen. Chen hurried to that family while the head of the household was getting ready to take the wolf to the animal protection bureau. In a chance of a lifetime for a photographer, Chen took a number of close-ups of the wolf's head. Each picture depicts the ferocious look of the animal.



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Chen also showed me an article on a magazine featuring a recent encounter between a man and some wolves. I broke into a cold sweat when reading the story, as if I was facing a wolf in the wild alone.

The article related the story of wildlife photographer called Ge Yuxiu who was waiting through the night to shoot some pictures of mountain antelopes at daybreak in the east of Qinghai Lake. The encounter took place at around five in the morning in January 2005. The sky was still dark and the contours of the landscape were barely visible. Situated in the west, the dawn does not come to Qinghai until about eight. As such, Ge was dozing during his long wait.

He wrote, "All of a sudden, I heard howling and was woken up from my slumber. It's the howling of wolves, I said and felt my heart sink. The place I was in was the habitat of wild wolves. Indeed, not long before I had seen the left-overs from three antelopes savoured by the wolves. By instinct, I held fast to my tripod and tried to come up with some solutions as quickly as possible. Run? No way! A tiny move will arouse the attention of the wolves. Anyway I couldn't possibly run fast in the sand dunes. Shout for help? Even worse! The nearest nomads are least three kilometres away. Even my cell phone offered no signal. Suddenly a thought came to mind: if the wolves ever get close to me, I would use the flashlight of my camera to scare them away. If they advance further, I would hit them with my tripod. With a strategy worked out, I felt less anxious."

When the wolves were only about a hundred metres away, he could then clearly see through the early light, an antelope being chased by five of them. The howling was indeed the signal to inform other wolves in the pack that food had been found. Old Ge held his breath and tried his best to hide himself. His heart raced as the pack closely followed the antelope. The wolves finally raced past him through a sand dune not more than 30 metres away. He can never forget that moment; being in intense fear, he was nevertheless privileged to witness the ancient struggle in nature as the terrified antelope ran for its life chased by a ferocious wolf pack.

Fallen into a Trap of Wolves

Last October, I met a Tibetan nomad named Jiesang in Xining, capital of Qinghai Province, who originally came from Batang Township located in the southern slope of Bayar Har Mountains. In recent years, as the Wildlife Protection Act has been launched and the hunting rifles of the nomads have been confiscated, the wildlife is becoming more active. In one spring recently, wolves have taken more than a hundred yaks in three villages of west Batang County. Each yak can be sold for more than 3,000 yuan so this creates pressure on wolves and humans in this area. In summer, the wolves are blatantly roaming around the villages. One day in May, three of his yaks were eaten and Jiesang could not bear it anymore. He borrowed a rifle from a friend to frighten the reckless beast. That day, he found two wolves lying still on the ground with listless eyes as if they were sleeping. Seeing this, Jiesang sneaked quietly towards them but just when he was about to fire, he suddenly heard a stirring from behind and was stunned to find a giant wolf standing up and throwing itself towards him. At that moment, he had no other choice but to shoot to save his life but killed the giant wolf. The other two wolves, which had been pretending to sleep immediately, ran away. Was this just a coincidence or a well-laid trap by the wolves?

Because of man's intervention over the last 50 years, the food chain balance has been upset causing the rampant growth of wolves in some remote areas and very few in the prairies rather than an even balance of species throughout the region.

Translated by Dora Tsang

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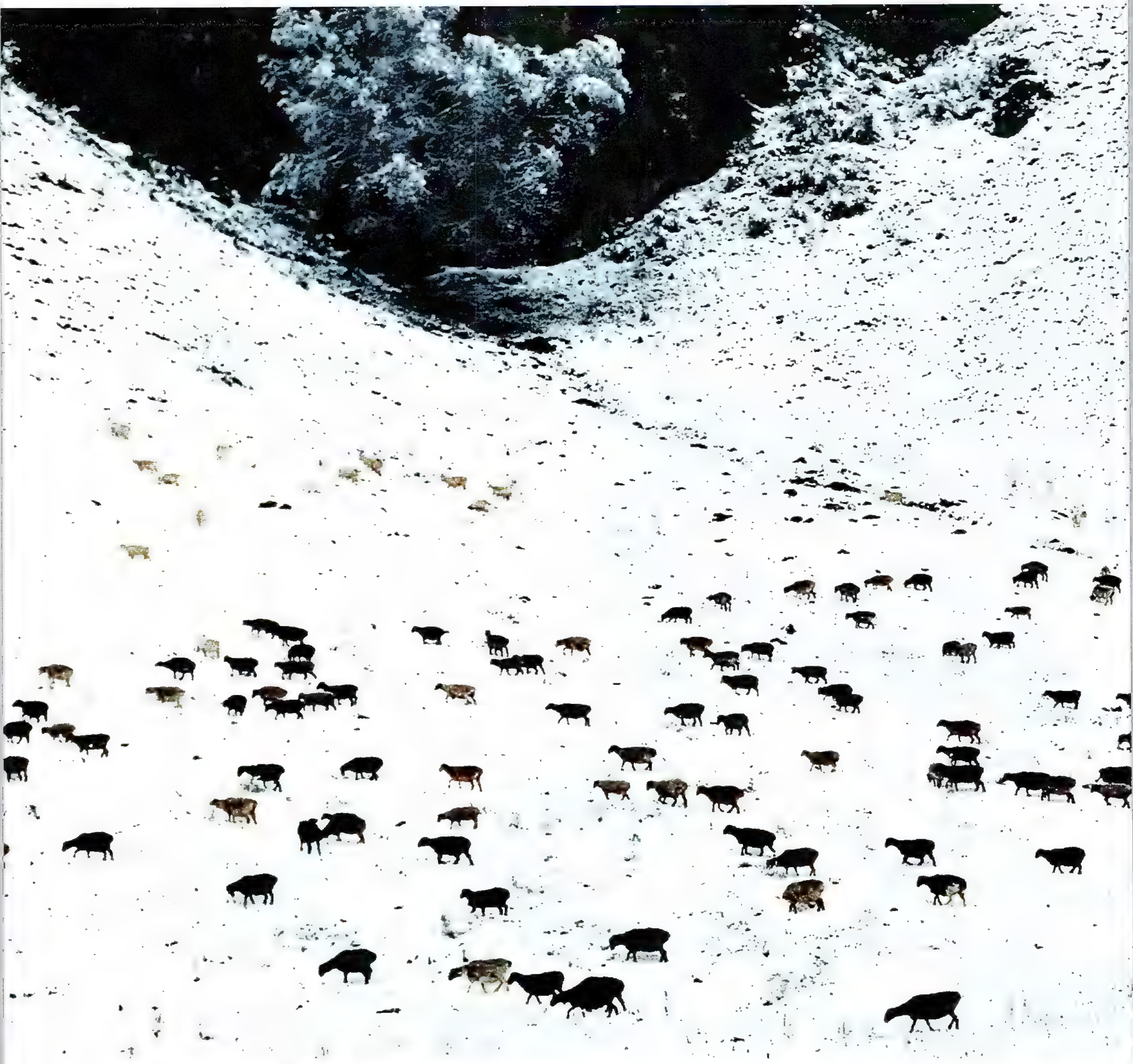
Traces of Life

Photos · Wang Chen

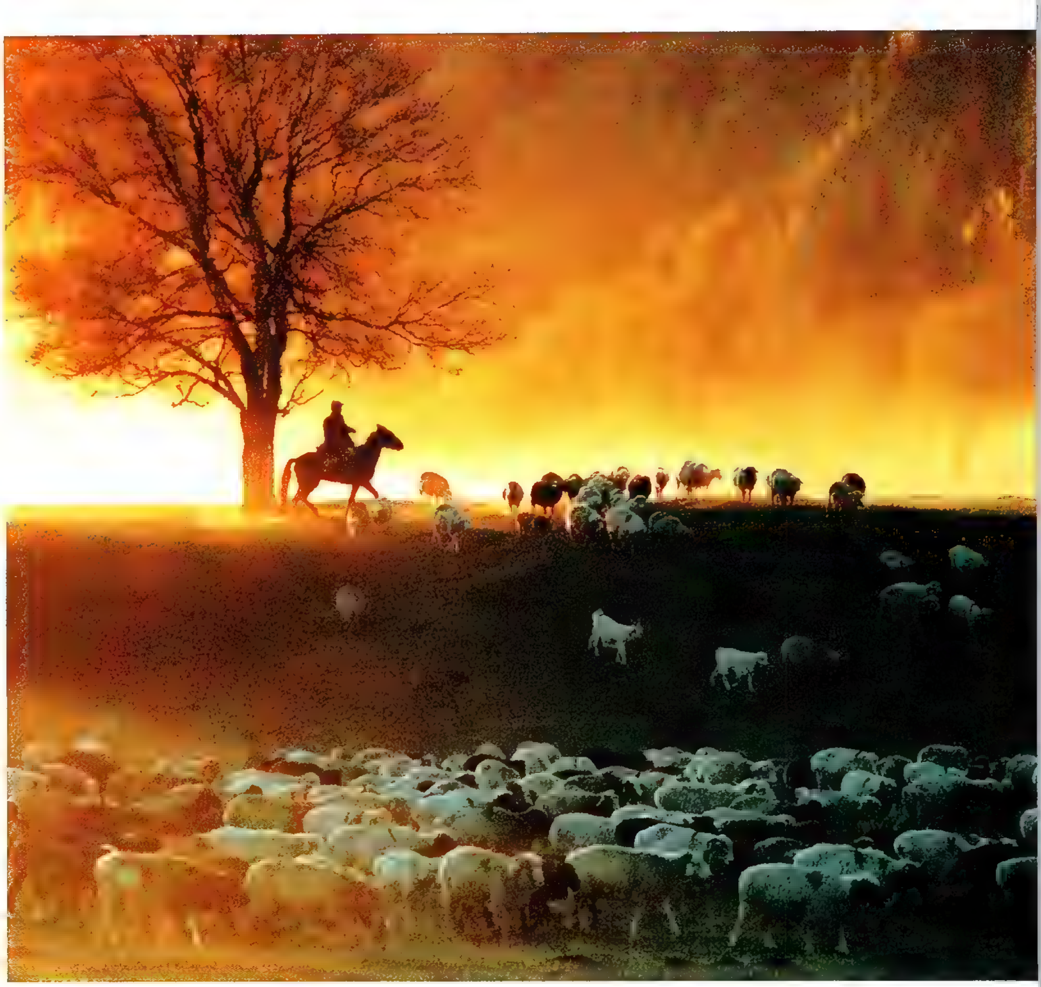


A harmonious scene combining sheep and a snowy mountain valley. **Location:** Mt Tianshan, Xinjiang

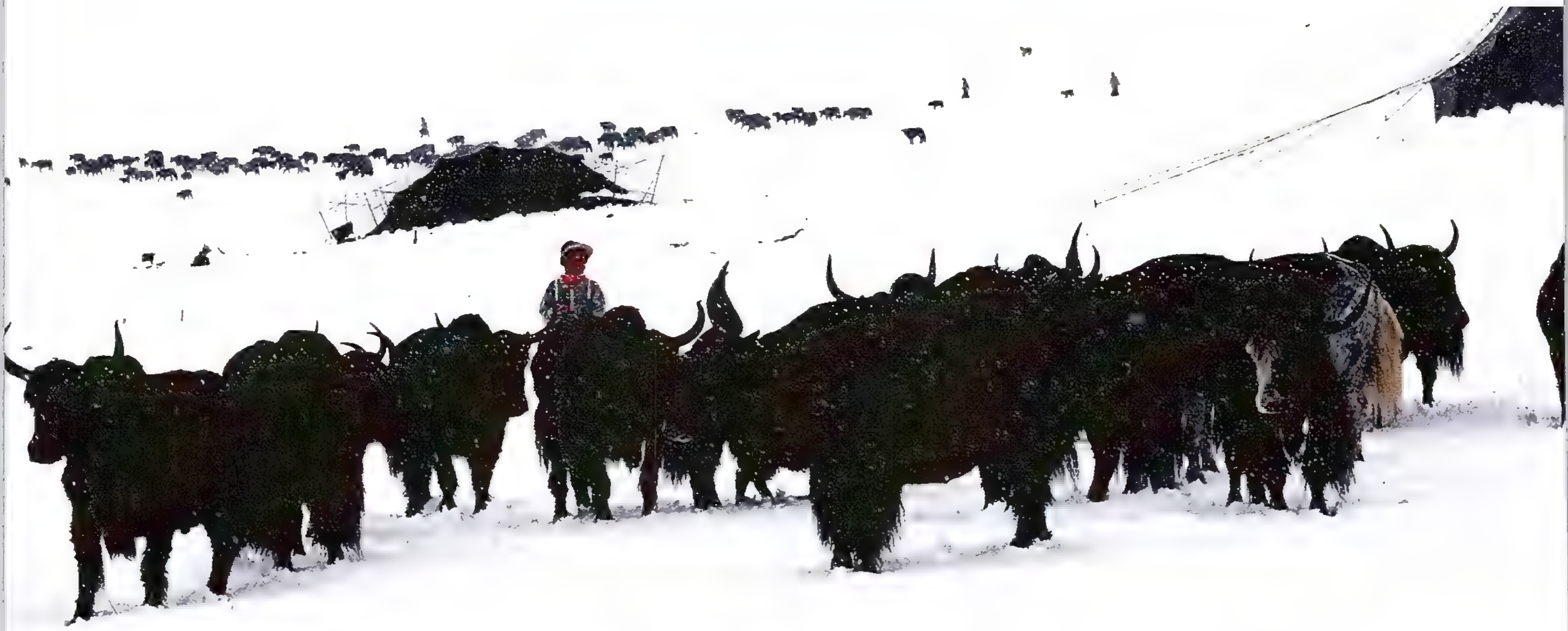
The passage of time leaves a mark in our daily lives and the landscape photos of photographer Wang Chen capture these traces of life.

As a scenery photographer, Wang Chen's photos always express a touch of human kindness. The photographer explains, "I always try and pursue the feeling of life in my landscape photos so I like to include highways, houses, animals like cows and sheep, birds and of course people."

His motivation for doing this is to create a difference in his work from other photographers. "Photos taken by others which only capture natural landscapes can all look alike. For example, you visit a place this year, it looks like this; you visit the same place a year later and it can still be looking the same. But, if you include something related to life, such as people and animals, the same scenery cannot be repeated. As in art, only that which cannot be copied or repeated can be worthy of being called classic."



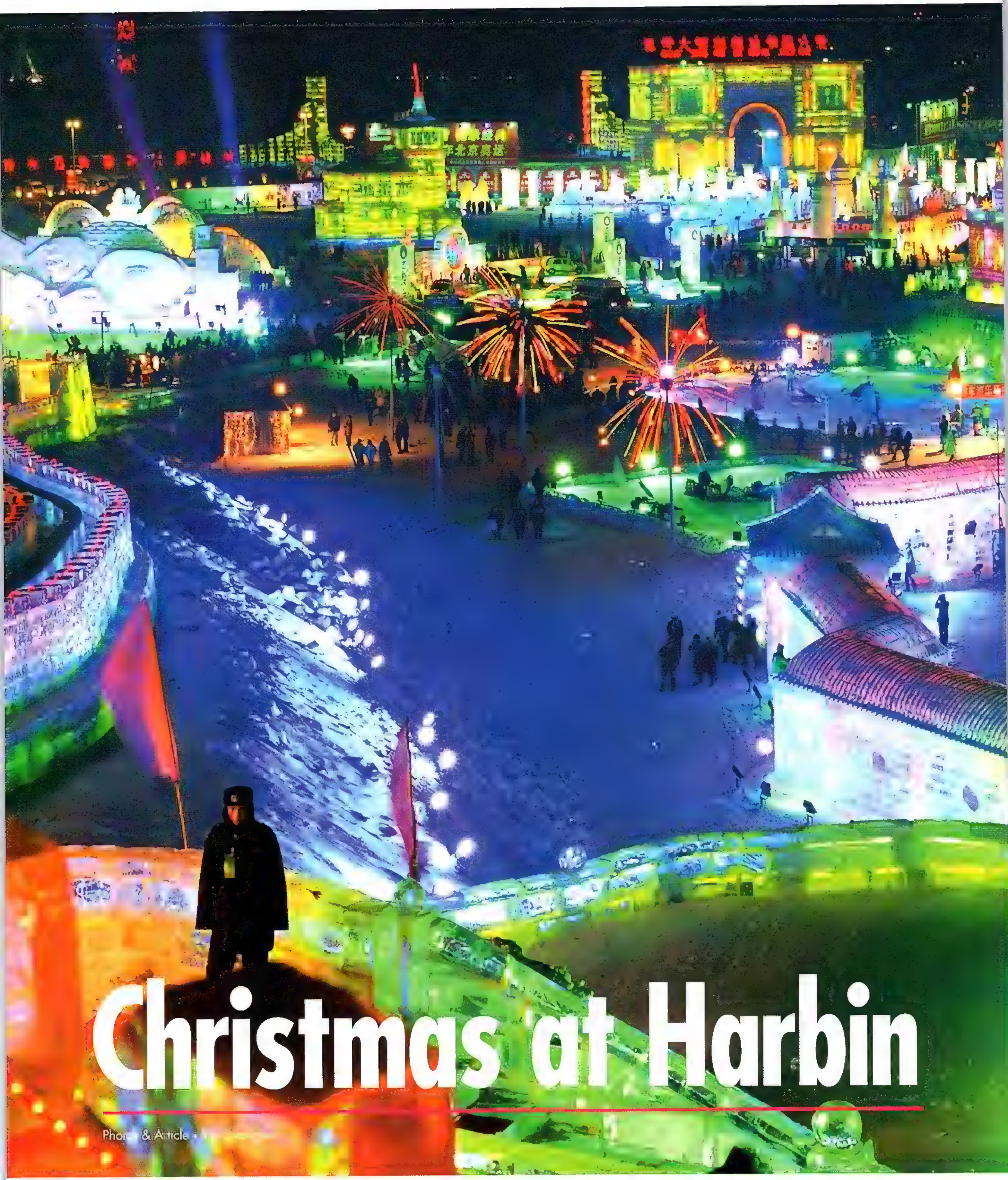
A warm moment of herding in the pastureland. **Location:** Xinyuan, Xinjiang



The yaks always display a strong vitality, even under severe winter conditions. **Location:** Mt Zheduo, Sichuan

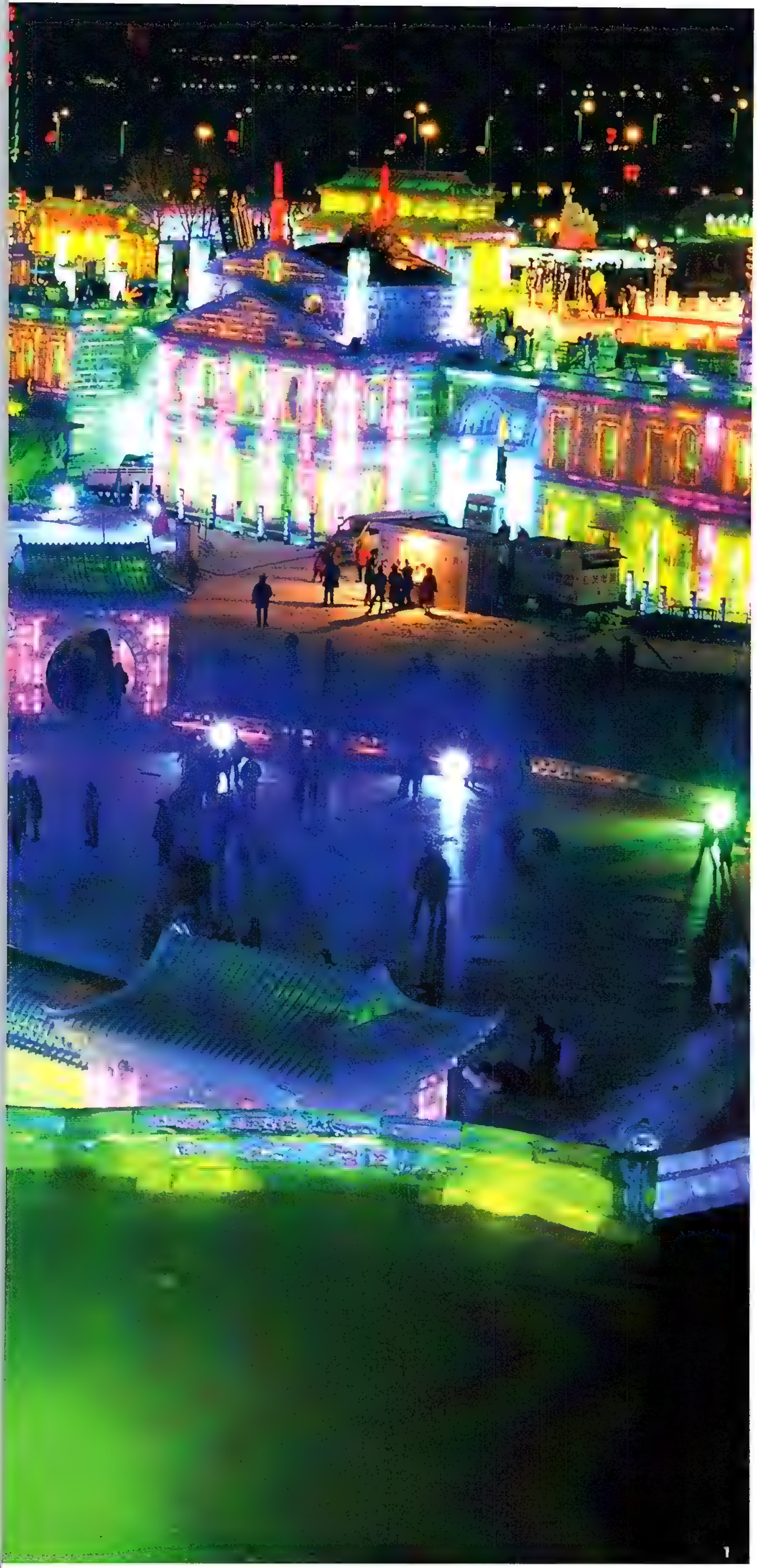
A neat composition concisely expressing the sacred love between parent and child. **Location:** Yinchuan, Ningxia

Compared to the vastness of Mother Nature, people are as small as the grains of sand on the beach. **Location:** Mt Tianshan, Xinjiang



Christmas at Harbin

Photo & Article



Harbin in Northeast China's Heilongjiang Province is a rather exotic city, with the orderly square tiles paving Central Boulevard, its European-style hotels, the largest Eastern Orthodox church in the Far East, and of course the magnificent International Snow & Ice Festival. Everyone is warm and extroverted, expressing their emotions and thoughts through song and broad gestures. The city is saturated with a European air and has a strong, flavourful appeal that's all its own.

1. A brilliant night view at the annual Harbin Snow & Ice Festival.

2. Russian tourists feel at home among the European buildings along Central Boulevard. They seem to be really enjoying themselves.

1

I set off for Harbin from Hangzhou on the day before Christmas. Some three hours into the flight, we were informed that the plane would land in 20 minutes and that the ground temperature was -20°C. Many passengers seemed to be caught by surprise at this news. I looked out the window at vast expanses of thick snow, glistening beautifully yet intimidating for what was sure to be its penetrating chill. Suddenly I began to worry whether the plane could land in such conditions. And I was not the only one feeling anxious — my fellow tourists, many of them from the South, all fixed their eyes on the view outside. I could tell who the Northerners were by the calm way they accepted our situation. In their serene expressions I could clearly see their joy at having finally returned home.

After we landed, we all gradually stood up to collect our luggage and put on our down jackets. We looked like a bunch of overstuffed dolls in our bulky clothing and completely filled up the narrow aisles of the plane as we disembarked.

First Ordeal: Enduring -20°C

Perhaps still warm from all the body heat on the plane, I did not feel particularly cold when I first stepped outside. "Minus twenty degrees Celsius isn't too bad after all," I thought. Just then a gust of frigid wind found its way down my neck and sucked the last bit of warmth from my body. Shivering, I immediately pulled the zip all the way up to my chin. Stuffing my hands in my pockets, I tried to disappear into my jacket.

Relief came when we boarded the heated bus. But there was a layer of ice on the bus windows, like a thin curtain blurring the view outside. I tried to scratch it off with my hand, but as soon as I touched the glass I immediately snatched my hand back, for it chilled me to the bone. A fellow passenger informed me, in a local accent, never to touch the ice as it could hurt my skin. Then he took out his identification card and used it to rather professionally scrape the ice off. He then reminded me to take off my jacket in the bus to keep from sweating as this could cause me to catch a cold later on when I got off the bus again.

While Harbin winters are extremely cold, it is wonderfully warm indoors. The temperature at my hotel was kept at a toasty 26°C, making a northern winter far nicer than a southern one. No wonder northerners like to stay put in winter and refrain from travelling, especially to the south. Most cities south of the Yangtze River do not have indoor heating systems, as they are warmer for a greater part of the year. I suspect it is the humidity coupled with the chill unique to the southern climate that keeps northerners away. They say such a climate explains the mild temperament of southerners. Although most households in the south now have space heaters at

連卡佛
Lane Crawford

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home, they only provide heating over a limited area and they tend to pull moisture from the air, leaving the occupants dehydrated. Heaters in the north, by comparison, are far more comfortable.

Chinese Eastern Railway: Origins of Modern Harbin

The next morning, I put on my heavy jacket, cap and gloves and headed outside. The streets were icy, making it difficult to walk, so I moved along carefully. Above, the sky was pure blue and the rooftops and sills were all covered with snow. In the sunshine, everything looked white, even my own breath. The streets were peppered with snow-melting powder, the dark colour of which reminded me of charcoal. It was not yet rush hour and hardly any pedestrians were about. Cars drove past, keeping a considerable distance from each other. I raised my arm and flagged down a taxi, which slowly pulled alongside the curb. "Isn't it difficult to drive in winter?" I asked the cabbie. "You're from the south. Am I right?" he asked, smiling. I nodded. He went on: "You cannot brake suddenly on an icy road. Instead, I usually break little by little or shift to a lower gear." Then I noticed that the windscreen wipers on the parked cars we passed were all pointing to the sky, like radio antennas. My curiosity

1. Ice sculptors from around the world create artistic ice sculptures in Harbin every year.

2. The Flood Control Monument, at the northern end of Central Boulevard next to the Songhua River, is both a characteristic building of Harbin and an important tourist attraction.

3. Central Boulevard, Harbin's first commercial street, boasts more than 70 different European-style buildings and is sometimes called "a museum of architectural styles".

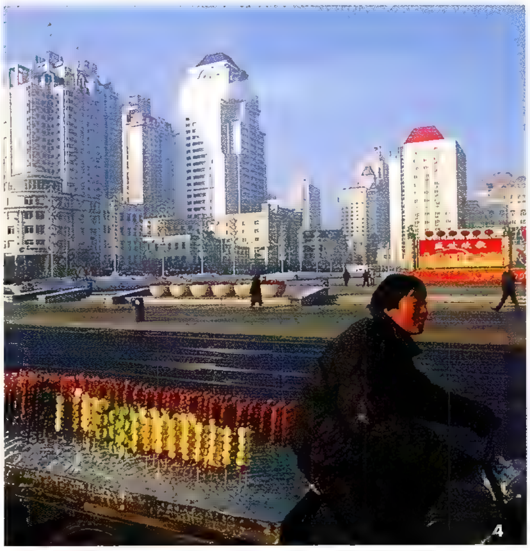
4. Eating sugar haw strings in winter — a sight unique to Harbin.

Chinese Eastern Railway: The Start of It All

The name Harbin originally came from "Alejin" in Manchurian, meaning "fame" and "honour". During the Guangxu Reign of the Qing Dynasty, it was a remote, sparsely populated village.

On June 3, 1896, in a bid to expand its influence in the Far East and the Pacific, the Russian government hoodwinked the Chinese delegation headed by Li Hongzhang into signing a mutual defence pact (at a time when the country was still grappling with the aftermath of the first Sino-Japanese War). The fourth article of this "pact" decreed "for logistical reasons, lest Russia be attacked in future, [the building of] a railway connecting Jilin Province and Vladivostok... this could be left to the Russo-Asiatic Bank." The Russo-Asiatic Bank, camouflaged as a Sino-Russo joint venture, was in fact controlled by the Russians.

This Chinese Eastern Railway (CER, also known as Chinese Far East Railway) is the Bingzhou line that now connects Manzhouli and Harbin and the Bingsui Line between Harbin and the Suifen River. Covering a total of 935 km, it runs by and large in a straight line. Further on from Manzhouli it heads to West Siberia and from the Suifen River, to Vladivostok. On March 1893, the Russian government was granted further rights to build and manage the southern line of the Chinese Eastern Railway after signing the Luda Land Lease Treaty. This, in turn, further expanded the original line into a "T" shape. On April 24, a research team was sent to China to the triangular area between Songhua River and its tributary, the Ashi River. This is where we now find the city of Harbin. On June 9, a team headed by Russian engineers arrived in Harbin by ferry. Together with hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers, they began constructing the Chinese Eastern Railway. More significantly, this day also marked the beginning of modern Harbin.



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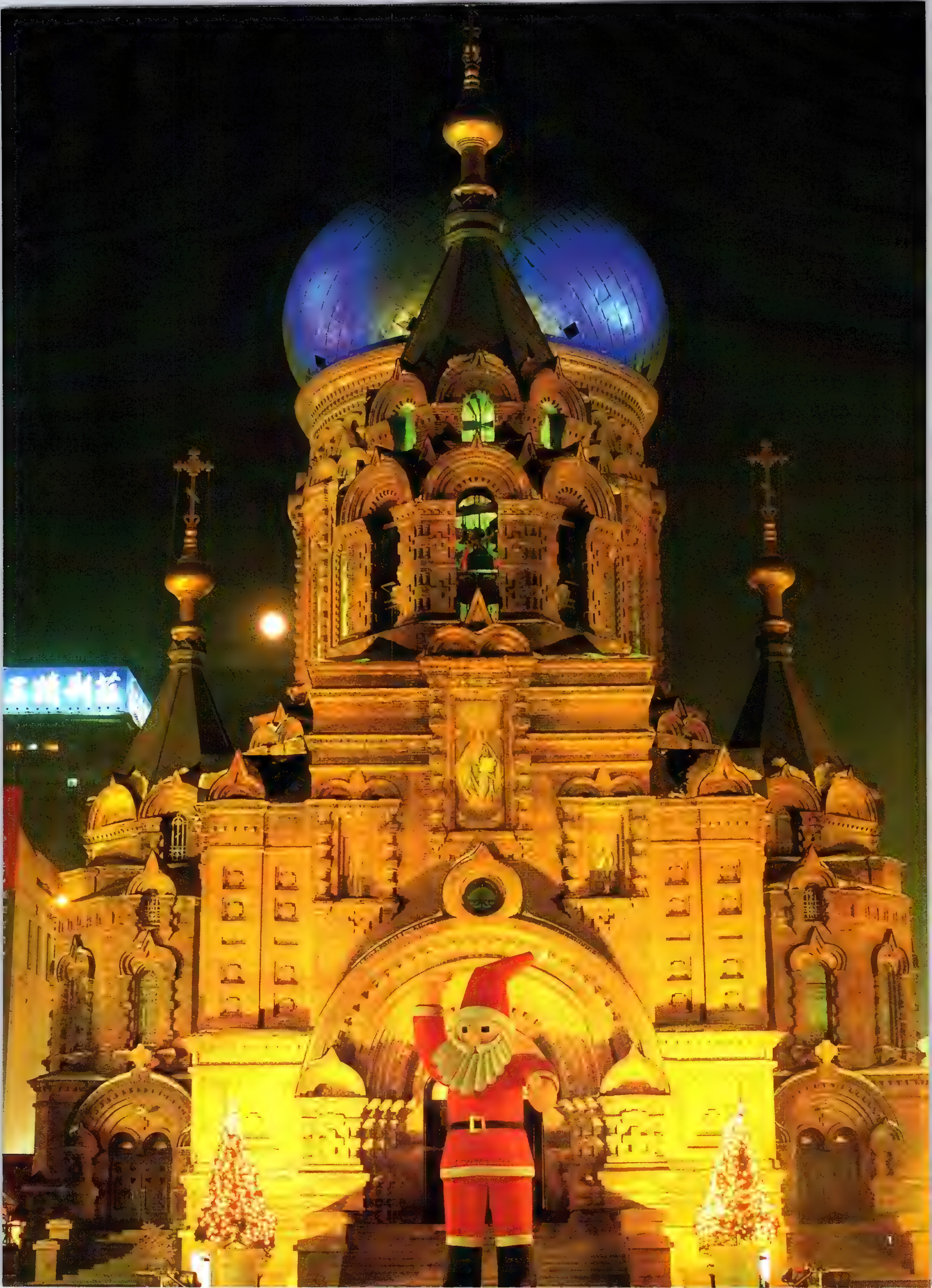

got the better of me and I asked him why. He said: "To keep the wipers from freezing to the windows." He was so agreeable that I ventured another question: "I've also heard that in winter when people take a leak outside, the pee freezes before it drops to the ground. Is that true?" He laughed before answering: "That's exaggerating a little. However, the exhaust that cars emit can quickly turn to frost." Three-wheel motorcycles drove past us from time to time, their back ends covered in sheets of plastic. The people draped within could only be seen vaguely, almost like shadow puppets. The effect was very beautiful. Sometimes vendors passed us with their sugar haw carts. I asked: "Can you really bite into one of those on such a cold day?" He said: "If you want to eat sugar haws in winter, you need both good teeth and the courage to do so. Young folks like them." We stopped at the Flood Control Monument. Here, at the bank of the Songhua River, I could see, to the east, the famous Bingzhou Railroad Bridge, which starts in Vladivostok. From there it passes through the Suifen River, Harbin and Manchuria, all the way to West Siberia. This international channel encompasses Eurasia and has also played a part in Harbin's development.

After the Chinese Eastern Railway was put into operation in 1903, Harbin quickly grew from a tiny, remote outpost into one of the most prosperous cities in the Far East. At its peak, the city welcomed 160,000 people of 33 different nationalities, all seeking their fortunes. The city's overnight success is something of a miracle in the history of urbanisation in China. And it was during this process of cultural exchange that Harbin acquired the uniquely European style that distinguishes it from most other Chinese cities.

Central Boulevard: Architecture Avenue

Central Boulevard, which starts from Flood Control Monument Square by the Songhua River to the north, travels southbound through Jinwei Street, covering a total distance of more than 1.4 kilometres. Originally called China Street, it was the city's first commercial thoroughfare and is more than 100 years old. The street was made of stone tiles fixed tightly to the ground. Central Boulevard is lined with structures built in the Renaissance, Baroque and Byzantine styles, making it a veritable "museum of architecture". In 1913, a Jewish Russian businessman built the Modern Hotel. Complete with movie theatres, cafes and jewellery stores, it was the most luxurious hotel in the Far East. The Songpu Building just opposite is a typical Baroque structure. A store opened by Japanese businessmen in 1918, it was considered the most beautiful building in the city at that time. The Huameixi Restaurant next-door was established by the local Jewish community. It serves mostly Western food and snacks and was passed over to different managers of Russian, German, Polish, Czech and Chinese descent. Best known for its Russian food, the restaurant is apparently not as popular as it used to be. This is not too surprising. As more people come to place a higher value on efficiency, even when it comes to food, it's hard for traditional Russian cuisine to compete against so many burger joints, KFCs and Pizza Huts. And perhaps fewer people care for Russian food these days.

Nevertheless, the Huameixi Restaurant is my favourite. It is such a wonderful place! Whenever I tired of walking along Central Boulevard, I would find a seat right next to the window and order a cup of coffee or tea. Sometimes, I would have a few cakes to replenish my energy and wait for my nose, ears and fingers to warm up again. With a cup of good, hot coffee in hand, classical European buildings just outside the window and the prospect of seeing a horse-drawn carriage emerge from the end of the street... I found myself imagining I was in a Russian city in the 19th-century. No wonder people call Harbin the "Moscow of the Orient".

Street Signs in Russian

In 2003, the former name of Fendou Road, Gogol Street, in Nangang District was restored. Anyone with knowledge of Russian literature will be familiar with

1. St Sophia's Cathedral, the largest Russian Orthodox cathedral in the Far East, still has a profound influence on the religious beliefs of the locals.

2. Winter swimmers from Russia and Harbin tour the Songhua River.

3. Russian residents in Harbin celebrate Christmas. The city is their second home.

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热烈欢迎
HARBIN

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1. The small stone tiles of Central Boulevard remind visitors of 19th-century Russian cities.

2. During the Christmas season, the city glows with a holiday atmosphere.

3. Traditional dances performed by Russian artists at the city's Snow Festival are a favourite with the locals.

4. A young dancer at an entertainment centre in Harbin.

Gogol. Born in the Ukraine in 1809, Nikolai Vasilevich Gogol is perhaps best remembered for his play *The Inspector General* and his novel, *Dead Souls*. A satirical comedy, *The Inspector General* ruthlessly criticised the corrupt government of Tsar Nicholas I. In *Dead Souls*, Gogol portrays an ailing Russia under the slave system. Gogol's works were to have a profound impact on those of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Russian literature in general.

Construction of Gogol Street began in the early 20th century when most street signs were still in Russian. Those who could not read Russian translated them phonetically. Therefore, Gogol Street became "Guoke" Street. During the Revolution of 1917, the Chinese government regained sovereignty over Harbin and gradually changed some of the Russian street names to their phonetic equivalents in Chinese. For instance, Balkan Street was changed to Bashan Street, Romania Street to Lujia Street, and Gogol Street, along with Xinmaimai Street north of the Majiagou Bridge, was changed to Fendou Road.

Quite a few Russians used to live on Gogol Street. Russian hospitals, churches and the Miqiuli Department Store, founded by a Mr Miqiuli, have all been kept intact. The new Gogol Street has retained its Russian style, with the Alekseyev Cathedral Square, European Scenery Bridge, Russian River Garden and its trams. More than 20 buildings along the street have been restored to their natural, antique and refined Russian style. There is also a pub corner with Western restaurants, bars, cafes and a market selling mainly Russian products. The street is now one of the city's most-visited attractions, with several bars retaining their Russian signage to help visitors from across the border feel at home.

Onion-domed Wonder

Standing at the crossroads of South Zhaolin and Toulong streets, one cannot help but be mesmerized by the towering presence of the St Sophia's Cathedral, the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedral in the Far East. The Eastern Orthodox Church along with the Catholic and Protestant churches make up what is normally referred to as the Christian religion. At the end of the 16th century, the Russian church decided to become independent from Constantinople and proclaimed the old Slavic Russian Orthodox Church as the national religion of Russia. After the signing of the Treaty of Kiakhta in the fifth year of the Yongzheng Reign (1727), China opened Kiakhta to trade with Russia. Naturally, religion followed. With the commencement of the Chinese Eastern Railway, Harbin became the most renowned trading port in the northeast. Soon, the Fourth Infantry Battalion of Tsarist Russia invaded Harbin and, to mollify the soldiers stationed away from home, construction of St

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Sophia's Cathedral began in 1907. At the outset, the wooden church only served as the refectory for the army. On September 27, 1923, however, reconstruction of the cathedral began and, after nine years of work, a cathedral boasting both commanding and delicate qualities was completed.

St Sophia is a typical Byzantine cathedral. With a two-metre thick level of marble as its base and red-brick walls, the cathedral is capped with a huge onion-dome topped with a cross. Four smaller pinnacle towers, also topped by crosses, supplement the structure to create a Latin cross layout. The four auxiliary towers are connected by stairways and each has its own entry door. The bell tower sits atop the main entryway. The seven copper bells within strike seven different notes along the scales. The cathedral has a profound influence on the religious beliefs of the locals.

On Christmas Eve, I found myself standing in front of the St Sophia's Cathedral, which, bedecked in glittering lights, looked almost new. As the bells chimed and snowflakes fell from the sky, a group of Russian tourists gathered at the cathedral's entrance. While it no longer has a religious function, the cathedral was still a sacred place to them. I suddenly felt a nameless affection stir within me. It was perhaps the most memorable Christmas Eve I've ever known.

Translated by Hu Jun

Travel Tips for Harbin

About Harbin: Capital of Northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, Harbin has been described as a "pearl hanging from a swan's neck". With an urban area of 1,660 sq km and a population of over 9.5 million, Harbin is the country's largest and most crowded provincial capital. The city is also a centre for politics, economics, science and technology, culture and transport in the northern part of Northeast China.

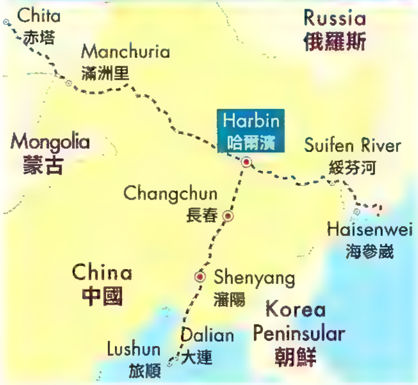
Climate: Located in the northern temperate zone, Harbin has an average temperature of 3.5°C, but this varies widely according to the season. In January the daily average is -20.1°C, and in July, 21.7°C.

Transport: By Air - Harbin Taiping International Airport is the second largest in Northeast China. China Eastern Airlines and Air China provide flights between Hong Kong or Shenzhen and Harbin every day. Average cost for a one-way flight is about HK$2,600 per person.

By Train - Harbin was the first Chinese city to construct railway, which is one of the most important railway transit systems in Northeast China, with connections to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Dalian, Wuhan and Zhengzhou, as well as Russia and the Korean Peninsula.

By Car - Harbin has an excellent highway network that runs to such cities as Jiamusi, Tongjiang, Mudanjiang, Suifenhe, Daqing and Qiqihar. It is best to avoid the long-distance bus to Harbin in winter; the train is much more convenient. However, if you wish to visit Jiamusi, Tongjiang, Mudanjiang, Qiqihar, Yichun or Hegang, there are frequent scheduled buses that are comfortable and travel along the major, well-kept highways.

Location Map of Harbin



City of Fantasy and Joy —
Two Visits to Hengdian World Studios

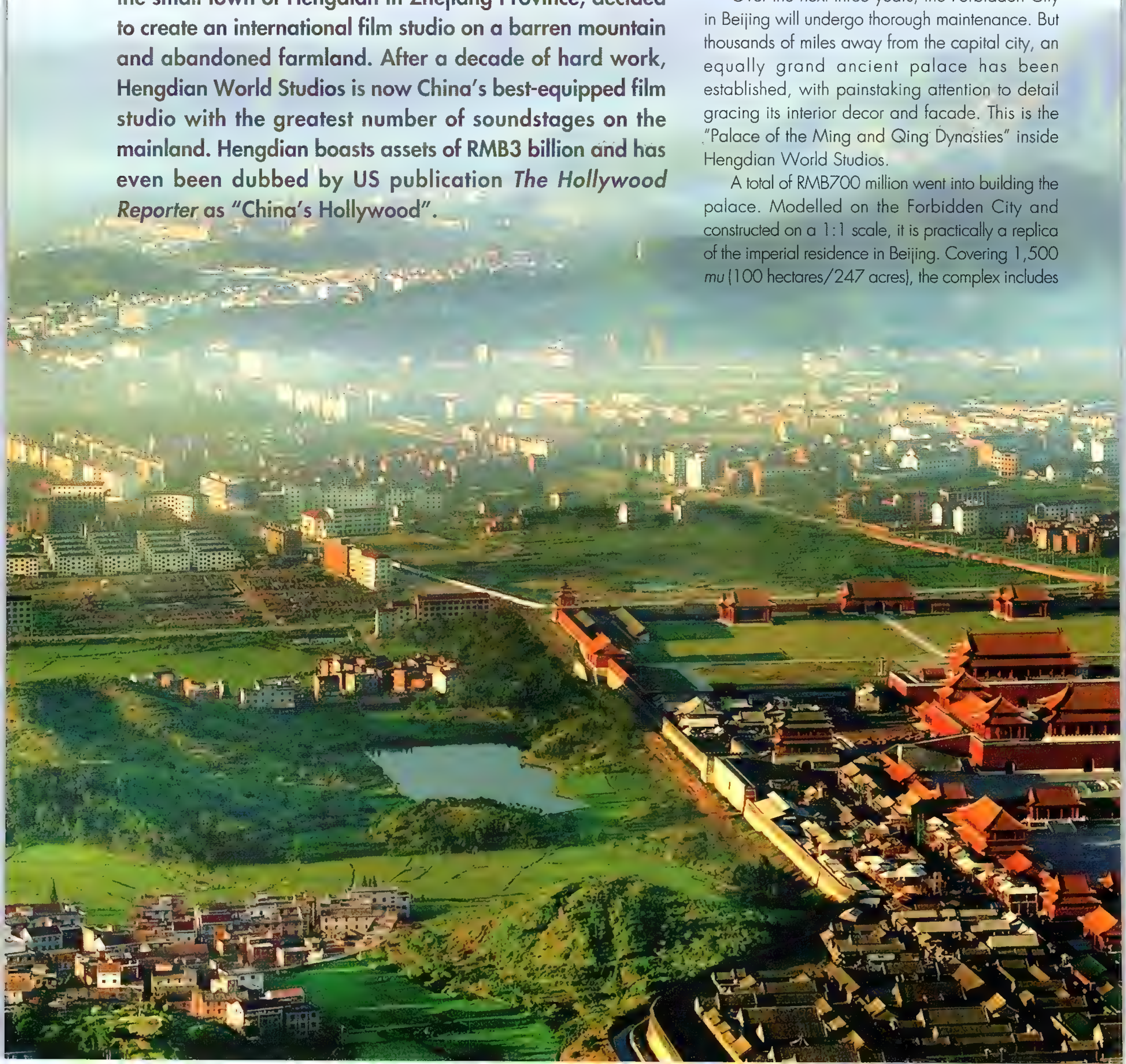
Photos & Article • Adam Wong

In the mid-1990s, Xu Wenrong, a local entrepreneur in the small town of Hengdian in Zhejiang Province, decided to create an international film studio on a barren mountain and abandoned farmland. After a decade of hard work, Hengdian World Studios is now China's best-equipped film studio with the greatest number of soundstages on the mainland. Hengdian boasts assets of RMB3 billion and has even been dubbed by US publication *The Hollywood Reporter* as "China's Hollywood".

Journey Through Time

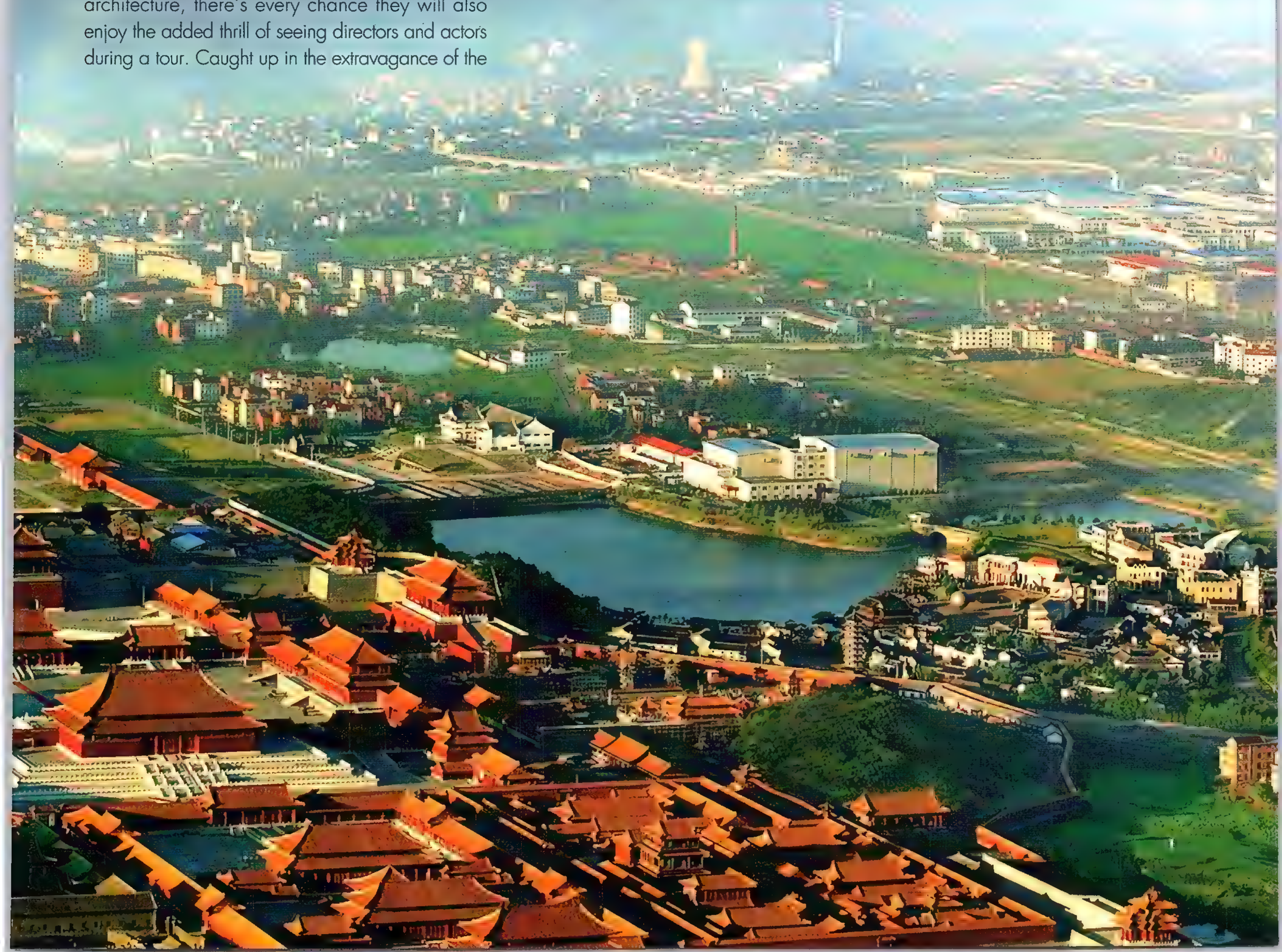
Over the next three years, the Forbidden City in Beijing will undergo thorough maintenance. But thousands of miles away from the capital city, an equally grand ancient palace has been established, with painstaking attention to detail gracing its interior decor and facade. This is the "Palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties" inside Hengdian World Studios.

A total of RMB700 million went into building the palace. Modelled on the Forbidden City and constructed on a 1:1 scale, it is practically a replica of the imperial residence in Beijing. Covering 1,500 *mu* (100 hectares/247 acres), the complex includes



an imperial palace, royal garden, emperor's mansion and even *hutong* lanes that faithfully reproduce Old Beijing. Since its founding, the studio has served as the set of many Hong Kong TV dramas and movies.

While tourists will certainly enjoy their journey through time here amid the Ming and Qing-style architecture, there's every chance they will also enjoy the added thrill of seeing directors and actors during a tour. Caught up in the extravagance of the



1. Overlooking the grandeur of the "Palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties" atop the mountain. (by Jin Tianshui)

2. Hengdian World Studios immerses visitors in the distant past.

3. The "soldier" crew at Wumen Gate take their noon break.

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imperial palace and greeted by "warriors" and "bandits" brandishing swords, I could not help but wonder if I had somehow actually entered the past. In the grandiose Taihe Hall, which houses a meticulously copied imperial throne, visitors excitedly changed into imperial robes to impersonate emperors, empresses and heirs apparent. No one could pass up the chance to play an imperial ruler. I was told that Chow Yun-fat (Master Li Mubai in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000) and Gong Li (Hatsumomo in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, 2005) were shooting a film in a hall nearby. Unfortunately, I was not able to see them in action.

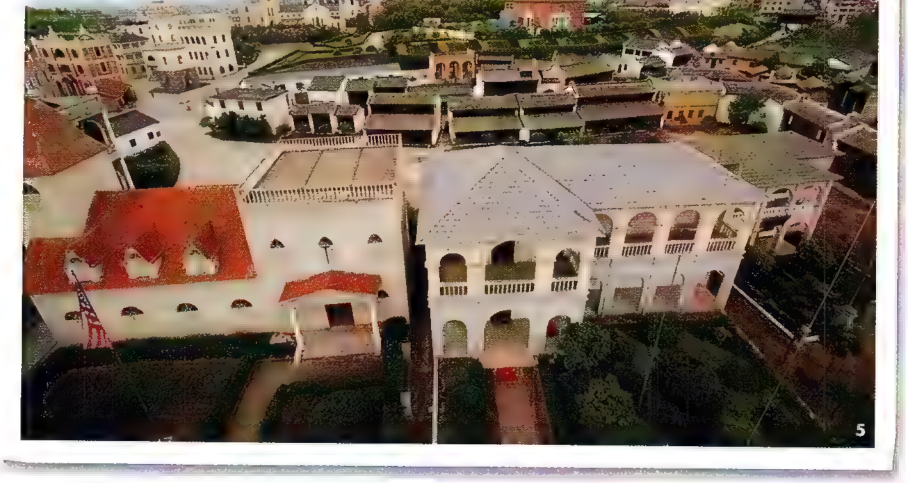
On Sunday mornings, as a gesture to movie fans, any actors and actresses who happen to be working at the studio are invited to attend a "Movie Stars Face-to-Face" meeting at the Wumen Theatre. Although I had the "honour" of attending the interview, I never got to see the stars as a throng of film fans rushed in to greet them, blocking my view.

Entertaining "Jiangnan Water Town"

Although "Jiangnan Water Town" is actually a miniature version of the real water towns south of the Yangtze, it is nevertheless the most entertaining and popular attraction at the studio. Not only does it comprise the best a South China water town can offer, but it is also the only attraction in Hengdian that can be enjoyed at night.

The replica bridges, rivers, houses, taverns, theatres, teahouses, and structures built over streets, little well tables, old shrines and stone board streets create a vivid representation of life in Jiangnan during the late Qing period. When night falls and the lights have just been lit, reflections of red lanterns on the river further complement the festive atmosphere. Riverside Chinese restaurants and teahouses quickly fill up with people. Waiters in traditional dress with towels draped over their shoulders greet and usher in customers, who can enjoy entertaining performances while savouring delicious food.

After dinner, everyone heads to Phoenix Hill Square to watch the "nuo dance" by the Wa minority of Yunnan Province. "*Nuo* dance" is a traditional dance of the southern areas performed in the past to either pray for rain or offer sacrifices to the gods. We were utterly mesmerised by the performance when a few cracks of deafening



thunder broke and "rain" began to lash down from the sky. Had the dance really worked? Suddenly huge gushes of water poured from the mountains and drenched the crowd! Everyone was shouting, trying to escape the flood, but several were caught in the downpour. Looking down at their wet shoes, they beamed with excitement and joy filled their faces.

Jiangnan Water Town is a 24-hour paradise of food and shopping. Each shop, restaurant, snack bar, handicraft store, teahouse, wood carving gallery, calligraphy and painting gallery or pawnbroker here doubles as a movie set.

As I walked down the stone board street, I came to a wine shop where I was shown the locally brewed "Stone Cave Wine". Pure-brewed from glutinous rice, each bottle sells for the bargain price of just over 10 yuan!

Life in Old Canton

On my second visit to Hengdian, I got to see the sets for the Guangzhou and Hong Kong of a century ago, including streets reflecting 1940s Hong Kong and Guangzhou built for mainland director Jin Xie's movie, *The Opium War*.

The streets are right next to each other. Hong Kong's Pedder Street, Chater Street, Queen's Road Central, Statue Square Governor's Residence, and St John's Cathedral are recognizable, but as they would have appeared in decades long since past. It was like returning to one's hometown walking back and forth between the streets.

I was drawn to a traditional Chinese structure by the river. As I got closer, I read the signboard, Changchunyuan — a famous brothel in 1930s Guangzhou, patronized by a prestigious clientele. Although the building is empty, red lanterns hang out front bearing the names of different prostitutes and offering visitors a glimpse of what their shadowy lives must have been like. Suddenly a gunshot rang out. In the square by "River Pearl", martial artist Huang Fei Hong exchanged fire with some police officers. More than 10 different live performances are staged here daily covering all sorts of subjects, such as the opium wars, elections, exotic song and dance shows, and gunfights.

The best show is "Struggling in the Raging Sea". The Victoria Harbour cityscape of Hong Kong Street and the old pirate ships are breathtaking. Actors take on the roles of pirates and customs officers and put on a hilarious show. In the "raging sea", the water motorcycle performers display amazing skills, deservedly earning the audience's appreciation.

Tianlan Court, another popular spot, is known as the Number One Teahouse in the World. To my astonishment, not a single nail was used to build this wooden structure. This miracle of ancient Chinese architecture is an exact replica of the original, which was demolished long ago. The classical atmosphere

1. Spring in "Jiangnan Water Town".

2. Fragrant, freshly baked Jinhua crispy pie.

3. Refreshing "Stone Cave Wine": try before you buy. How many "warriors" have become drunk this way?

4. An ethnic rain dance.

5. Visitors indulge their nostalgia for old Guangzhou and Hong Kong.

1. Enveloped by mountains, the high walls of Emperor Qin Palace house many "ancient" palaces. (by Jin Tianshui)

2. The "emperor's" procession has begun. Get your camera ready!

3. Hengdian's Tianlan Court is an exact replica of the original. Not a single nail was used to reconstruct this famous Guangzhou teahouse of the 1930s.

evokes the spirit of golden days gone by. Like the dual-use structures on Hong Kong and Guangzhou streets, Tianlan Court is an actual teahouse. As I sat on the balcony sipping aromatic tea, an elderly man appeared beside me, seemingly out of nowhere. Was he a fairy? He turned out to be an actor from Beijing here to shoot a film set in ancient times. His martial-arts elder costume aged him considerably; he's only in his 60s.

Chasing Heroes in Emperor Qin Palace

The towering Emperor Qin Palace, which spreads over 600 acres, is suitably imbued with a distinctly imperial atmosphere.

Built in 1997 for the film *The Emperor and the Assassin*, it has also featured in *Hero*, and the Hong Kong production *The Promise*. Twenty-seven astonishing palaces with towering walls have been built in the area, creating an impressive ancient city. Much of Hero was filmed at the "Four Seas Converging in One Place" palace. At 44.5 metres high and 600 metres deep, the building reflects the awesome power of the Qin Dynasty and the six nations that came under its rule. The main door is

framed by two "flying dragons", each with the head of a crocodile, claws of an eagle, wings of a bird, fish scales, legs of a deer, and whiskers of a carp, features that symbolize the authority and auspiciousness of the Qin Empire.

A number of performances are staged at the Emperor Qin Palace every day. Most repeat lavish scenes from famous films, allowing visitors a taste of court life in the historic Qin and Han dynasties.

As special palace music solemnly plays, "Emperor Qin" parades into view. Flanked by his servants and guards, the "emperor" leaves the palace and slowly descends its 99 steps. Visitors, who have been waiting a long time for this moment, rush forward to have their picture taken with the "emperor".

A performance at the relatively new site where *The Promise* was filmed transports the audience back to a distant past of skilful swordplay and martial artistry. When the show is finished, many people stay behind to try out the flying equipment. Hanging from special wires, they put on feathery clothes and fly up into the sky....

The breathtaking battle scene in *Hero* is re-enacted in the Emperor Qin Palace. The battle in the Chess Court is something to behold. Costumed actors attached to flying wires "land" on the gigantic chessboard and engage in lively battles. Rain, thunder and lightning effects win non-stop applause from the spectators.

Commoners' residences sit alongside the palace, and a Qin and Han Dynasties Street is not far away. Filming takes place here every day. A film crew of make-up artists, actors and assistants occupied the street during my visit. Out of curiosity, I talked to a few "ancient" residents and learned that some of them were from Shanghai and Hong Kong. Two bouncy little girls, daughters of studio staff members, were also hanging around. Then I noticed that some visitors have been recruited as extras!

Hey director, how about letting me be a general?

Translated by
Hu Jun,
Dora Tsang

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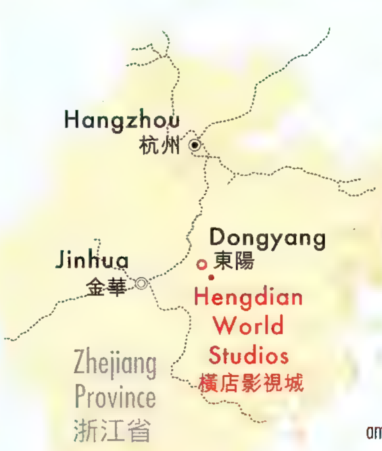
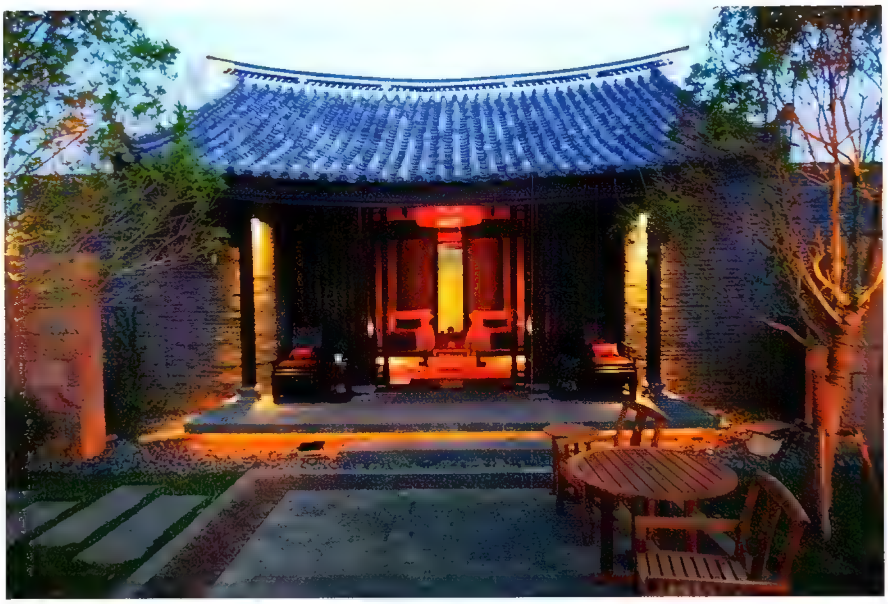
Travel Tips



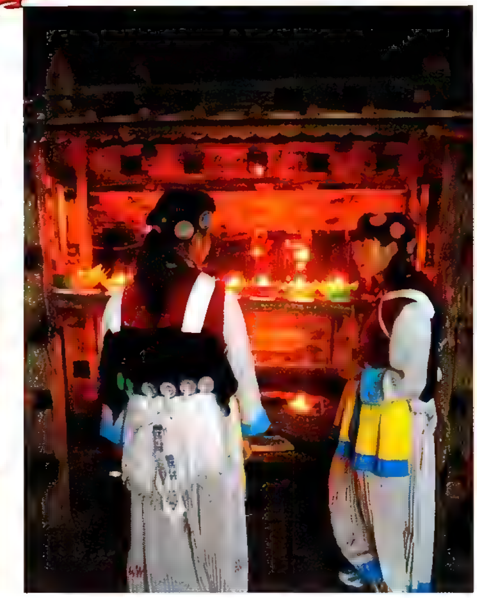
Add: 42 Wansheng St, Hengdian Town, Dongyang City, Zhejiang Province.
Tel: (579) 654 7180
Opening hours: 8:00 ~ 16:30
Admission: 220 yuan (pass)
Transportation: Take a train from Hangzhou to Yiwu or a bus from Yiwu Jiangdong Bus Terminal to Hengdian. Or take a direct shuttle bus from Hanzhou South Bus Terminal to Hengdian. There are four regular buses a day. The first bus leaves at 6:50 am and the trip to Hengdian takes 2.5 hours.
Website: www.hengdianworld.com



Luxury Tours to Lijiang & Shangri-La

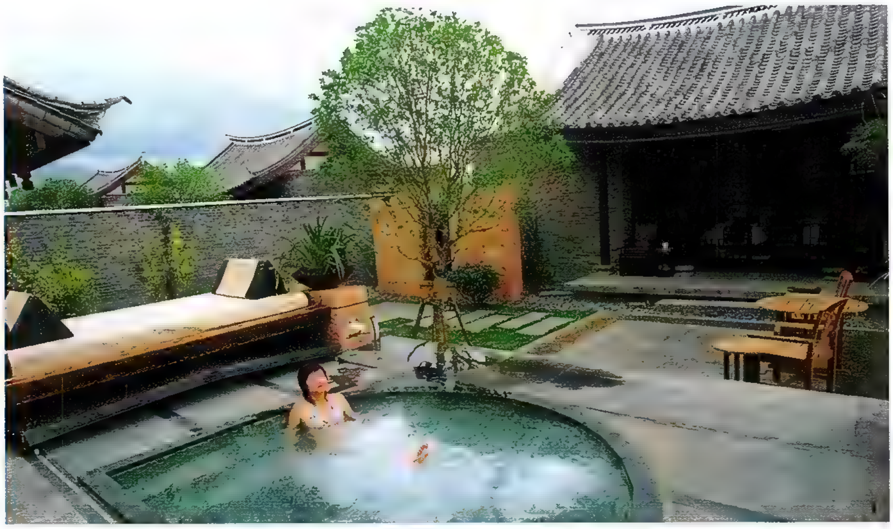
吔啦唆！
ya la suo

Photos & Article • Dianna Lau



When I mentioned to friends I was going to Lijiang and Shangri-La in Yunnan Province for the fourth time, their reaction was naturally to wonder at how I could put myself through another tortuous journey on the high mountain plateau. But I told them this time would be different. This time I would be travelling in style and in luxury.

Lijiang



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Banyan Tree in China?

"There is Banyan Tree in China?" was the amazed reply from a friend who has a taste in dining, accommodation and travel.

Renowned for its guarantee of quality, Banyan Tree is one of the world's best known brands for unique holiday escapes. It currently has 17 resorts, 49 spas and 53 specialty shops in 19 countries. For travellers the real attraction of the Banyan Tree concept lies in its incorporation of local culture into the design and architecture of each Banyan Tree resort, making your stay a real immersion in local culture.

Like all of its resorts, Banyan Tree carefully selects its location for the combination of natural scenery and local ethnic culture. And in Banyan Tree's two unique resorts in the Chinese province of Yunnan, this combination is unbeatable!

The Essence of Travel

The best time to visit Lijiang is between May and August when the skies are clear, the grasses are flowering and the weather is pleasingly mild. I boarded a plane in Shenzhen with a friend visiting Yunnan for her first time and we arrived a few hours later 2,000 metres about sea level. The hotel shuttle was calmly waiting for us at the airport. The local Naxi ethnic minority shuttle driver took us to the Banyan Tree Resort in 40 minutes all the while entertaining us with information about the local sights and the culture of the local Naxi people.

The Banyan Tree Lijiang is the second Banyan Tree resort in China in addition to the first resort located in Shangri-La around 200 km from Lijiang. For the convenience of travellers, the two resorts have put together a "Five Days Yunnan Tour" package comprising transfers, two nights in Lijiang, two nights in Shangri-La and a complimentary stone massage. This is how we spent our five days in heaven.

48 Hours in Naxi Luxury

"Wow, this is exactly as it is in the catalogue: Naxi style villa with garden overlooking the majestic snowy mountains and a 24 hour Jacuzzi!" Truly, our entrance to our rooms at the resort broke down any fears we had held about false advertising.

Our villa was the most basic of the 55 Naxi-style villas in the resort and yet we felt we were in another world. The garden was our most memorable discovery — here we ate breakfast and sunbathed in the glorious mountain air. After dark, the temperature in the mountains dropped suddenly and our attendant turned on the warm Jacuzzi overlooking the garden. In the 39 degree bubbling water, who cares if it was snowing outside?

From the Jacuzzi we gazed back at our rooms. The entire building was constructed from locally available materials such as five-colored stone and Naxi grey tiles. The effect was to recreate a traditional Naxi style home in front of us, right down to the distinctive curved roof. In the middle of the room lay a wide bed covered in rose petals. But the romance didn't stop there. Just when I was lying on the bed gazing out the front window I suddenly saw the majestic Jade Dragon Mountain appear right before my eyes! Like all the villas at the resort, spectacular mountain views were available from all directions!

We soon found the 300-square-metre villa was full of surprises: the study looked over the bamboo thicket, the bathroom with the tiles heated from below, the wide and open closet — we must spend at least two days to enjoy all of them!

Smart Tips

- Although the weather in the high plateau region can change from hour to hour, the Banyan Tree resort Jacuzzi is deliciously warm 24 hours a day — so don't forget your bathers!
- Don't forget your camera or video camera to record the details of your luxury villa — only then will your friends be jealous!

Eight Course Gourmet Meals

Visitors to the west of China are forgiven for feeling not a little nervous about the food, especially those travellers from places such as Hong Kong where spicy food is not eaten. Chefs at Banyan Tree Resort hail from southern China and thus the menu features highlights in light and fresh Cantonese cooking. We took the plungeand ordered a luxurious banquet of eight courses. The climax of the meal would have had to have been the Sino Black Chicken — served in transparent western style tea cups allowing the diner to taste the delicate flavor of the soup. Of course 5-star dining requires 5-star prices (320 yuan per person plus 15% service charge). Apart from fine dining in one's own villas, there are also many places to linger in the resort such as the outdoor teahouse, the comfortable library, the yoga room or the bar for a quiet drink among new friends.

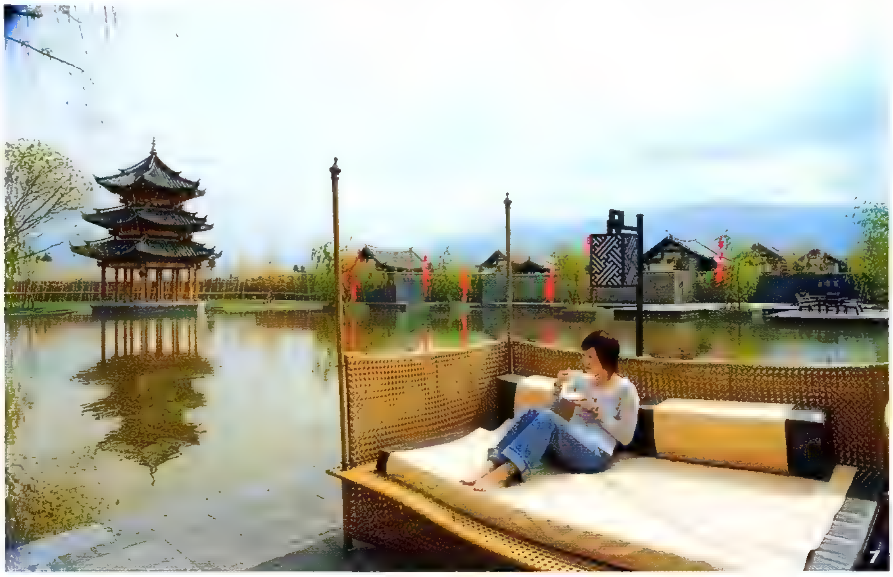
Touring The Old Town

Who visits Lijiang without stopping at the Old Town? After our day delighting in the comforts of the resort, at night we discovered the after hours fun of the Old Town.

After three years since I had last been here, I discovered it had completely changed!

Leading my friend into the Old Town bar street I found everything had changed except for the old stone bridge and willow trees leaning over the gurgling brook. For a second I thought I had been transported to a courtyard mansion in Shanxi: there were red lanterns hanging from the eaves of the shops, bars and hotels as if defiantly shouting out "red light district"! Strolling down the street, I could hear a sound rising and falling: "Ya Suo! Ya Suo! Ya La Suo! Ya La Suo!" I couldn't make out if it was Chinese, Naxi, English or Tibetan. By my watch it was 11 pm and yet the street was full of travellers and locals, having drinks al fresco, taking photos or, like us, following strange sounds to see where they went.

Listening carefully I could even hear someone speaking Cantonese: "Queen's Road West and then Queen's Road East, Queen's Road East and then Queen's Road Central" followed by a "Ya La Suo!" A few seconds later from the bar across the brook came another similar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From left: Suite at the Banyan Tree Lijiang, prayer wheels at Sumtsen Ling Monastery, Tibetan style furnishings at Banyan Tree Ringha Resort, famous service at Banyan Tree spa, Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, river lights in the Lijiang Old Town, a surprising rainbow caused by the constantly changing high plateau weather.

1. Each suite at the Banyan Tree resort includes a private garden and outdoor Jacuzzi.
2. The Banyan Tree Lijiang Resort is located next to the Shuhe River Old Town.
3. Your luxurious and welcoming bed.
4. Chess and games sets prepared for rainy days.
5. Attendants light candles for guests every evening.
6. Local soup served in European tea ware.
7. Enjoy coffee on the open air verandah.

chant followed by the same ending. It turns out they were matching rhymes!

In fact, many ethnic tribes in Yunnan practice matching rhymes. For example at the annual Shi Bao Shan Festival pairs of men and women sing to each other for a whole week in a courting ritual. I never thought this tradition had been carried down into this old town that had opened its arms to travellers from all over the world. As one of the most popular tourist spots in China, Lijiang had long ago lost the concept of "peak" and "slow" seasons. Even today, there was no high or low time of the day, but a constant flow of tourists and travellers cramming its streets night and day.

Although I was initially alarmed at the numbers of people on the street, I was soon won over by my friend's infectious excitement. As she saw it, this was the exact delight of travel — strangers coming together to share experiences and memories. I had to admit she was right: if the essence of travel was in relaxation, then why shouldn't we enjoy this carefree atmosphere and give in to wild abandon?

Smart Tips

If you stay at hotels around the Old Town be [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] rooms) – Cha Ma Ya Ge (茶馬雅閣), from which you will have views over the entire town, a wonderful surprise!

Up the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain

A visit to Lijiang would not be complete without an ascent up the Jade Dragon Mountain which looms over every corner of the Old Town. A shuttle bus from the hotel took us direct to the foot of the mountain and although we had arrived just in time for the morning rush, we discovered the other travellers around us were also Cantonese. It looks like Jade Dragon is a certain hit among us southerners!

My previous visit to Jade Dragon was six years earlier and I was pleased to see that since that visit there had been great improvements in the facilities on the mountain. The terrifying vision of grabbing on to the cable car wire with one hand while fending off a snow shower with an umbrella in my other hand was now, thankfully, a distant memory.

In a few moments we were suddenly at 4,000 metres above sea level. I reminded my friend to take it easy as we ambled up the steps allowing walkers to reach the top of the mountain.

As a reporter it was in my nature to try and outdo everyone else, and thus I climbed the mountain to the best of my effort, step by cautious step. The only disappointment though was when I reached the top at 4,680 metres, my camera suddenly took on "altitude sickness" and refused to record my epic ascent. Well, you'll just have to take my word for it!

My friend wisely chose to stay close to the cable car station after she developed shortness of breath and dizziness. As I came down from the summit to find her I saw her sitting calmly making up herself with lipstick from her compact. Just when she had finished and put it away, a concerned passer by rushed up: "Miss, are you alright? Your lips are blue; do you have altitude sickness?" My friend suddenly realized — in the bright light she had mistakenly applied purple lipstick!

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1. The fun goes on all night at the bar street in Lijiang Old Town.
2. At 4,506 metres above sea level, Jade Dragon Mountain is a must see for all visitors to Lijiang.
3. From the cable car station, steps lead to the top of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain.
4. Shangri-La's Ringha village — the essence of tranquility and harmony.
5. Banyan Tree Ringha Resort's villas are converted from traditional Tibetan farm houses; upstairs is the luxurious bedroom.
6. The roomy bathroom downstairs.
7. Stone Heated Hotpot — a delicacy for Cantonese palates.

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Shangri-La

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Off to Shangri-La

Saying farewell to our luxury house in Lijiang, we set off in the hotel car to our next luxury destination at Shangri-La, 3,200 metres above sea level and a quick four hours way.

The best time to visit Shangri-La is in spring when warm breezes caress the high mountain plateaus and fields turn into a tapestry of wild flowers. When we reached Zhongdian, our driver pulled over to let us run through the wild flower fields; albeit with the unexpected requirement of a 2 yuan entrance fee and 10 yuan for photos with the local people! I didn't object to the fee, but hoped that the money would be re-invested into the tourism resources of the area and provide a sustainable future income for the local populace.

Smart Tips:

[illegible]

Some people can be affected by altitude sickness at 2,000 metres. Symptoms may include a rapid heartbeat, [illegible] and headaches. [illegible]

A Bed at 2,000 Metres

We arrived at Shangri-La Banyan Tree Resort at dusk and were quickly ushered into the traditional Tibetan style lodge. The attendants didn't let us lift a finger to take our luggage; fortunately too as my friend was feeling heart pangs brought on by the thin mountain air.

The 32 villa Banyan Tree resort is located in a sacred Tibetan area called Ringha. Over 2,000 years ago this area was proclaimed sacred by the ancient religion of the Tibetan people and a temple still lay on the hill above the town today. The surrounding area was lush with abundant fields, thick forests, churning streams and gold mines in the neighbouring hills. No wonder as soon as we arrived we felt a soothing aura dispel all our worldly worries.

Banyan Tree Ringha Resort has already been open for one year and is the headquarters for the group's operation in China. The rooms here are the largest among all the group's resorts; even the most basic room which we stayed in came in at around 2,000 square feet (175 square metres). "Why so big?" you may wonder. The reason is because the hotel was originally built out of Tibetan village houses and converted into bedroom suites. Each suite has its own garden and verandah. On the upper level lies an open study, lounge room and bedrooms and on the lower level are changing rooms, bathroom and toilet. To the Tibetans who bathe in cold water, the most amazing addition would probably have to be the large hand crafted wooden tub in the bathroom!

Living in Heaven

Apart from altitude sickness, the other most important thing to get used to at Banyan Tree Ringha is the sheer tranquility. One morning as an experiment I held my breath and listened for

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1. Fields of flowers at Shangri-La.

2. A cultural tour of Shangri-La organized by the hotel.

3. Sifang (Square) Street in the Shangri-La Old Town.

4. Sumtsen Ling Monastery — the largest Yellow Sect Tibetan temple in Yunnan.

what sounds I could hear from the front verandah. I heard soft whispers from the gurgling streams, the quiet rustle of wind through the pine forest, the gentle tinkle of a copper bell hanging from the neck of an ox working the fields. Lastly, I heard the thump-thump of my own heartbeat — thankfully I was still alive and living in Heaven itself!

"So beautiful!" were the words that we repeated like a scratched record during our stay.

"So tired!" said my friend, exhausted by the size of our room and the exertion under the conditions of high altitude to climb up and down the stairs between the bathroom and the bedroom. It's no exaggeration to say that on this trip, she had climbed the extent of Jade Dragon up and down those stairs!

Environment and Culture

Since the resort is located at least 45 minutes by car from the nearest town, entertainment choices here are strictly limited to experiencing the genuine primitive farming lifestyle. There are a number of tours offered by the hotel, all led by local Tibetan guides. Such tours include walks in the surrounding countryside, horse rides to meet the local farmers, boat rides up local rivers or visiting local markets. We chose the basic "Cultural Tour of Shangri-La" beginning at 10am and led by a local youth fluent in English, Mandarin and Tibet by the name of Nom Nom. He told us he had just returned from working in Nepal when he found this new hotel had opened only 10 minutes from his home. He applied for the guide job and was accepted, meaning he could work and still remain at home with his family.

Nom Nom led us on horseback with two local attendants to visit some local Tibetan families. In their homes we tasted butter tea, baked bread and cheese and discovered how they lived, worshipped and worked. Because Nom Nom was himself a local, he could answer our questions clearly and with understanding; and not with a little humour!

Afterwards, we pointed our horses in the direction of the mountain and the 800 year old Da Bao Temple halfway up the mountain. Although the temple looked run down from the exterior, under the expert introduction from the guide it wasn't hard for us to imagine its glorious former days. At noon, we stopped by another family home for lunch. These home visits were arranged in advance by the hotel allowing guests a chance to talk with locals and also providing an additional source of income for the villagers. After lunch we gave a small tip to the woman who has prepared us lunch. Although 10 yuan wasn't much, she seemed very grateful. The funny thing was that the lunch of four dishes and a soup wasn't Tibetan style cooking but had been prepared in advance for our Cantonese palates.

Walks in the Countryside

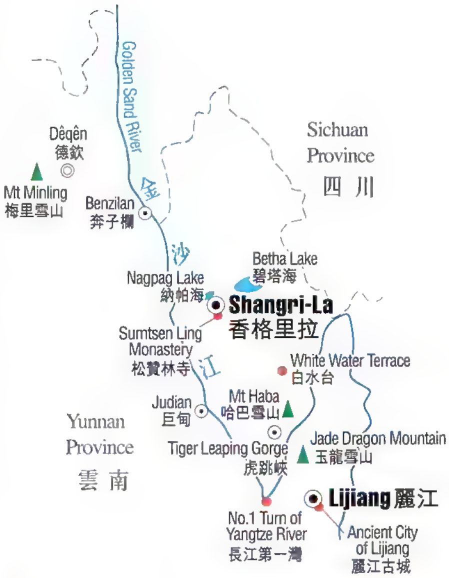
Since we had come to see the famous beauty of Shangri-La it would have been a shame not to experience the surrounding natural sights. One recommendation is to hire a car (300 ~ 400 yuan per day) and visit Betha Lake (60 yuan for admission, allow two hours to visit). As luck would have it, on the day we visited the lake was obscured by mist and rain causing us to miss out on a boat tour and the famed sight of birds fishing in the lake waters. However the beauty of Betha Lake was still discernible to even the most travelled: said a woman from Shenzhen next to us "This is even more beautiful than Jiuzhaigou (Nine-River Valley) in Sichuan."

Take a break for lunch in the county town before visiting the largest Yellow Sect Tibetan Buddhist temple in Yunnan Sumtsen Ling Monastery, known as the "little Potala Palace" (10 yuan admission, allow two hours to visit). Don't forget to tour the monastery in a clockwise direction and when leaving ask the driver to stop at the best place to take a photo and pay the locals 2 yuan to take a photo. Since you've come all this way — it's worth it!

After touring the monastery, take a stop in the Shangri-La Old Town, only newly opened for tourists. Like the Old Town in Lijiang, this is a hive of activity for shops, bars and restaurants all set among winding cobblestone streets and narrow alleys. But don't forget the altitude and winter weather are both far more severe than in Lijiang.

Before you leave don't forget to taste the famous local hotpot cooked on heated stones followed by taking a seat at the local performance arena to see a Tibetan song and dance show (60 yuan for admission, performances held nightly 8~10 pm). Seeing the excited audience jump to its feet and start wildly dancing, I couldn't help remember the song I had heard in Lijiang: "Ya Suo! Ya Suo! Ya La Suo!" Our driver later translated for us: "Good! Good! Very Good!"

Translated by Bret Sutcliffe


Golden Sand River
金
沙
江
Dêqên
德欽
Mt Minling
梅里雪山
Benzilan
奔子欄
Sichuan
Province
四 川
Betha Lake
碧塔海
Nagpag Lake
納帕海
Shangri-La
香格里拉
Sumtsen Ling
Monastery
松贊林寺
White Water Terrace
白水台
Judian
巨甸
Mt Haba
哈巴雪山
Yunnan
Province
雲 南
Tiger Leaping Gorge
虎跳峽
Jade Dragon Mountain
玉龍雪山
Lijiang 麗江
No.1 Turn of
Yangtze River
長江第一灣
Ancient City
of Lijiang
麗江古城

Travel Tips

Banyan Tree Ringha

Add: Hong Po Village, Jian Tang Town, Shangri-La County, Diqing (Dêqên) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan
Tel: (887) 828 8822 Fax: (887) 828 8911
Website: www.banyantree.com/ringha

Banyan Tree Lijiang

Add: P.O. Box 55, Lijiang, Yunnan
Tel: (888) 533 1111 Fax: (888) 533 2222
Website: www.banyantree.com/lijiang

The hotels offer different on-line exclusive packages which may be valid until October 2008, visit their websites and you may obtain more useful information.

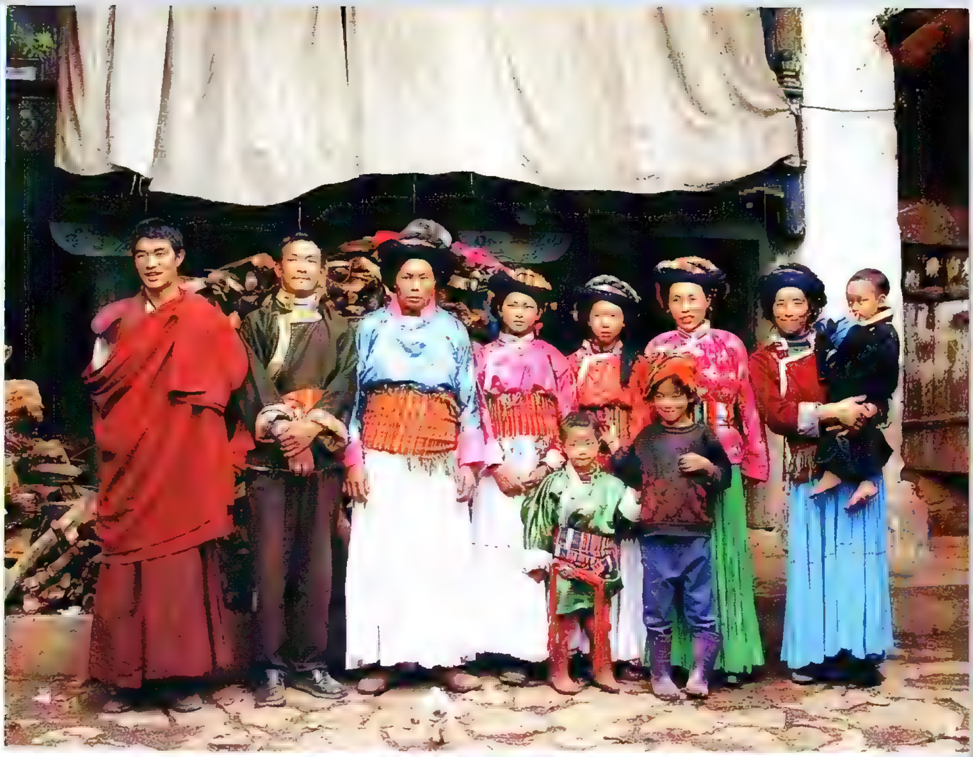
BANYAN TREE

The Mosuo People

— A Four-Year Field Study

Photos & Article • Hua'er

Editor's Note: For four years, Hua'er, the author, has been studying and photographing the Mosuo community on the border between West China's Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. Her writings and images record the lives and activities of this unique ethnic group, including their daily work in the fields, special ceremonies,"walking marriages" in which couples stay together for one night only to separate the next morning, as well as births and deaths. She feels so at home among them that she has practically become a Mosuo herself.



> The Mosuo's ancient marriage practices remain in the form of the walking marriage (*zou hun*), which means a man does not take his bride home, nor is a woman married off to her husband.

Lijiazui is a small village of 28 households under the administration of the Muli Tibetan Autonomous County, Sichuan Province. Located deep in the mountains on the Sichuan-Yunnan border, the village has no formal road leading to it. Formerly an important stop on the ancient Tea and Horse Caravan Route, the village was given the name of Lijiazui, which literally means "a place for rest en route" or "a place for the gathering of spirits" in Mosuo language. As of August 2005, the total population of Lijiazui was 385.

The village is the most completely preserved Mosuo matriarchal settlement found in China to date. It is considered a microcosm of the earliest matriarchal societies. The matriarchal family is both an organization based on the blood link on the mother's side and a basic way of life and reproduction. The Mosuo's ancient marriage practices remain in the form of the walking marriage (*zou hun*), which means a man does not take his bride home, nor is a woman married off to her husband. In the past, relevant government department included the Mosuos living in Ninglang, Yunnan Province, as part of

1. Lijiazui Village is nestled in the high mountains in Muli Tibet Autonomous County, Sichuan, on the border between Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. Though it was once an important stop on the ancient Tea and Horse Caravan Route, there is not yet a formal highway leading to the village.

2. Some members of the big Azhe and Apo families. There are 28 people in the family, including two lamas and a sorcerer.

3. The author on horseback.

It usually takes several generations or longer to create a new family within a large matriarchal family.

1

the Naxi ethnic group, and called them Mosuo people. Meanwhile, the Mosuos living in Yanyuan, Muli and Yanbian in Sichuan Province were merged into the Mongolian ethnic group.

That is why on the registration form, the villagers of Lijiazui all claim themselves as Mongolian under ethnicity. But in reality, 90 percent of the village's seniors say "We are originally Mosuo".

The Azhes: Family of 51

The first time I arrived at the village, my guide told me, "You may choose a family to stay with from among the Azhes, Dibis, Mupas ..." I picked the Azhe family before he finished reading out his long list. My reason was simple: it was the first mentioned. The Azhe family has lived in the village for 300 years.

I soon learned that a big family follows a strict seating order, and no one is allowed to challenge it. The awus (uncles on the mother's side) sit on the upper side of the fire pit (along with respected visitors), while the women and children all sit on the lower side of the fire pit, following the grandmother. Each member must abide by the rites and regulations of the family; and those of different generations love and respect one another. The old granny, or Dumalacuo Ari in the native language, is the core of the matriarchal family and occupies the highest position.

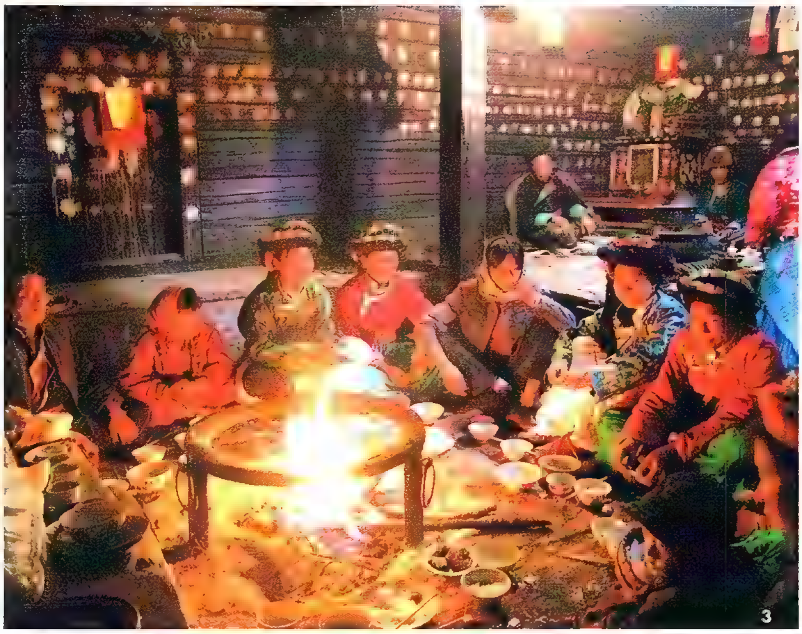
The uncles also have unquestioned authority. There are four uncles in the Azhe family, and they are involved in various family activities, such as house building, trading of domestic animals, and festival or funeral ceremonies. To a great degree, they determine whether the family's integrity and morality thrive or decline, since they are also responsible for raising and educating their sisters' children.

It usually takes several generations or longer to create a new family within a large matriarchal family. If a big family living below the poverty line splits in two, the result is two even poorer families, as their limited properties, including land, domesticated animals, houses, tools and utilities are also divided. Furthermore, the family will no longer be considered harmonious, which puts even more pressure on its members. Often there are too many women in a family, along with their own children. When a family is too large, life becomes difficult and confrontations will occur from time to time.

Sharing the Household

A Mosuo family residence is composed of the *rimi* (ancestors' hall), *galari* (prayer hall) and *nizhanri* (main and corner buildings) on a courtyard with buildings on all four sides. The Mosuo are great admirers of Ranbala, the God of Fire. Fire is equated with the spirit of everything in Mosuo belief. Every morning, after the fire is lit, a pine branch is burnt at the uppermost position of the fire pit to cleanse the air for Ranbala to begin a new day. At every family meal, they present him with a fresh cup of tea; during festivals, they offer the god various sacrifices. By doing so, they ask the God of Fire to protect and increase their property, expand the family, and keep the fire of life burning continuously.

At the entrance to a Mosuo household there is a chamber covered in sheets and decorated with flowers; this is the prayer hall. Every morning, Zhashi, one of the highly respected uncles in the Azhe family, pours clean water into the bowl in the hall; in the afternoon, he empties the bowl, but the water can only be used to water plants. On the days of the fifth lunar month, he lights the butter lamps, makes an offering of jar tea and burns incense. The butter lamps are lit every evening. The prayer hall is a holy place for the Mosuo. Until they have complete trust in a guest's nature and morality, they will not take him or



1. Lijiazui villagers as photographed by the author.

2. Work is divided among family members. Women drive the animals to the grazing land early in the morning.

3. On the eve of the Chinese New Year in 2003, the Azhe and Apo families enjoy a reunion dinner in their ancestral hall.

> The *daba* is considered the community's wise man, as he knows the people's history, culture and classic stories, as well as philosophy, astronomy, geology, medicine, etc.

her into their prayer hall.

According to local custom, people live together with their domestic animals. In the corner houses, the family usually lives on the upper floor and keeps their sheep, pigs, cows and horses downstairs. This is for the safety of both man and beast.

Eating the Pigskin

After supper, I often sat at the door of the prayer hall together with Yongzhu Cier, the village's sorcerer. Known as *daba* in the Mosuo language, the sorcerer represents the local religion, also called Daba. The position is passed down from generation to generation, and the *daba* learns the knowledge and skills orally. He is considered the community's wise man, as he knows the people's history, culture and classic stories, as well as philosophy, astronomy, geology, medicine, the clan pedigree and the routes of their migration, etc. He presides at festival celebrations, religious ceremonies and rites of passage. He forecasts the result of a disease, reads fortunes, disperses evil spirits, and shows the dead the path to the next life at funerals.

It is said that in antiquity, the Mosuo people had a written language, but the only one who knew it was the *daba*. As paper was not yet invented then, the Daba Sutra was written on pigskin. Once, the *daba* was called on by a rich family to conduct a disease-eradicating ceremony. The journey to their home was long and hard. After experiencing a number of hardships and setbacks, the *daba* ran out of travel provisions. Eventually he was too hungry to continue and had to eat the pigskin he carried. Fortunately, he had learned the sutra written on it by heart before eating it. After that, the Mosuos' written language disappeared. As the sutra was passed down orally, the mystery surrounding the Daba religion increased.

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A man involved in a walking marriage goes to see his lover after dark and must leave before daybreak, returning home to have his morning tea.

Walking Marriages

Li Xue, a teacher at the village school, tells me she is awakened every morning by talking and laughter outside her door. The men who have stayed with their A Xias (lovers) for the night always seem to gather in front of her small cottage. They won't scatter and go home until they have had enough boasting.

A man involved in a walking marriage goes to see his lover after dark and must leave before daybreak, returning home to have his morning tea. During the day, he works for his big family. He cannot stay with his lover in the daytime; even when they meet on the road, they won't talk to each other for fear of becoming laughingstocks.

When a man enters a walking marriage, he no longer has a bedroom in his own home. If, in certain cases, he has to spend the night with his family, he sleeps in the hay loft above the animal pen. The Azhes are the largest family in the village and there are not enough rooms for everyone. Therefore, many of the family's children grow up in these hay lofts.

Corner houses are reserved for a family's adult women and are known as flowery towers. Every night, the women sleep with their men in their private rooms. At the age of 15 or 16, a young woman is given a bedroom of about five or six square metres for privacy. A Mosuo woman can have several, a dozen or even several dozen lovers in her lifetime. When one partner does not want to continue, their relationship stops immediately, no matter how long it has lasted. The man and woman will turn to new lovers. There are cases, however, in which a man or woman has only one lover for life. There are no economic ties between the lovers, so no disputes arise whatever happens. When the woman is pregnant, she will maintain a stable relationship with the baby's father. There is no wedding, but the father will hold a banquet when the baby is one month old. This is a vital issue for the child. If there is no one-month banquet or the father does not show himself to the public on this occasion, the child will be shamed and cursed as having been born illegitimate. Children grow up in their mothers' families and their fathers are not obliged to support them in any way.

Work Takes Precedence

Among the villagers of Lijiazui, 55, or 14.3 percent, have been to school, but 90 percent have

1. This ancient means of farming has been preserved in Lijiazui Village.

2. Known as "flowery towers", corner houses are reserved for adult women whose lovers visit them overnight.

3. Geru Dashi, a *daba*, and his lover, Qiaozi Kamalamu.

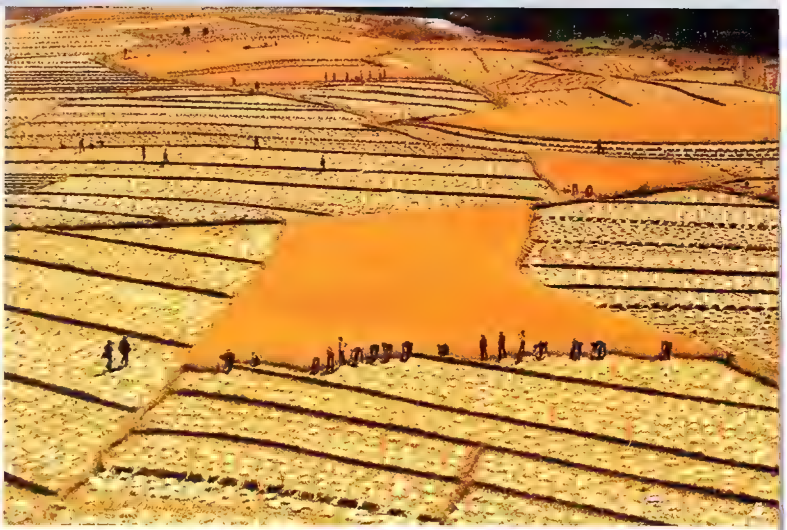
4. The only classroom in the village has no windows. On fine days, the teacher gives classes on the flatland at the entrance to the village.

Many seniors in the village fear that if a child receives too much education, his or her integrity may be threatened. This would be considered the biggest fault of one's life.

received only one year of education. They cannot write their own names. The village school only conducts first grade classes. To attend second grade and beyond, pupils must go to the township's central school, which is more than three hours away on foot. Few children in the village continue their schooling due to the long distance and the cost of tuition.

Before the Azhe and Apo family divided they numbered 28, including two lamas, one *daba*, 19 uneducated members and six who have been to school. The mothers around the age of 30 have an average of three children. It's commonplace that the oldest child does not go to school; and there is no guarantee that the second and third ones can go either. Since the household responsibility system for farming was carried out, the lack of labour has become an increasingly serious problem. Very often a child begins to work at the age of four or five, herding domestic animals, cutting grass, and collecting twigs for firewood.

Many seniors in the village fear that if a child receives too much education, his or her integrity may be threatened and they may abandon the traditions and rules passed down from their ancestors. This would be considered the biggest fault of one's life. No education is necessary for farming, herding, woodcutting and picking mushrooms, they argue, while stressing the importance of manual work. In daily village life, however, the influence of religious



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I told each woman to have her own sanitary towel. They laughed for a long time. In the village, family members often share one basin and one towel.

education prevails as a means to restrain behaviour and keep order in the community.

High Infant Mortality

At my invitation, Yang Xiaohong, director of the Yongning County Family Planning Centre, came to the village to offer free medical services on November 4, 2004. The women, who have never been out of the mountains, received their first gynaecological examinations. Most of them had gynaecological diseases, due to their marital traditions. In the past years during my field study in the village, women often approached me complaining of abdominal aches and other reproductive problems. One day after supper, I called the women villagers together and gave a lecture on basic feminine hygiene. Afterwards, they surrounded me, pouring out their problems. The next time I visited, I brought many sanitary towels for them, explaining that each woman should have her own towel. They laughed for a long time. In the village, family members often share one basin and one towel.

The check-ups also revealed an infant mortality rate of 14.45 percent. Many of the women had experienced the bitter loss of a newborn baby. When a woman has difficulty in labour, there is no emergency treatment for her in the village. The township clinic is seven or eight ridges away, too far to be of help. The majority of the villagers have never taken any sort of modern medication, so it tends to affect them more strongly when they do. Once, when the matriarch of the Wake family had a headache, I gave her three tablets, explaining that she should only take one per day. But the elderly woman swallowed all the three pills at once, hoping to feel better sooner. A moment later, she was foaming at the mouth. She could not understand why taking more pills than prescribed would not treat her better and faster.

Women villagers don't bathe, according to the tradition of their ancestors, nor do they wear underwear. During their periods, blood is allowed to stream down their legs. They have no idea what hygiene means and how they can have it.

Souls Return Home

The Mosuo believe a person's life consists of three parts.

The first part is from birth to 12 years of age, which represents the completion of the transmigration of life.

The second part, which runs from the first day of

1. The harvests support the villagers, so there are no sales or purchases.

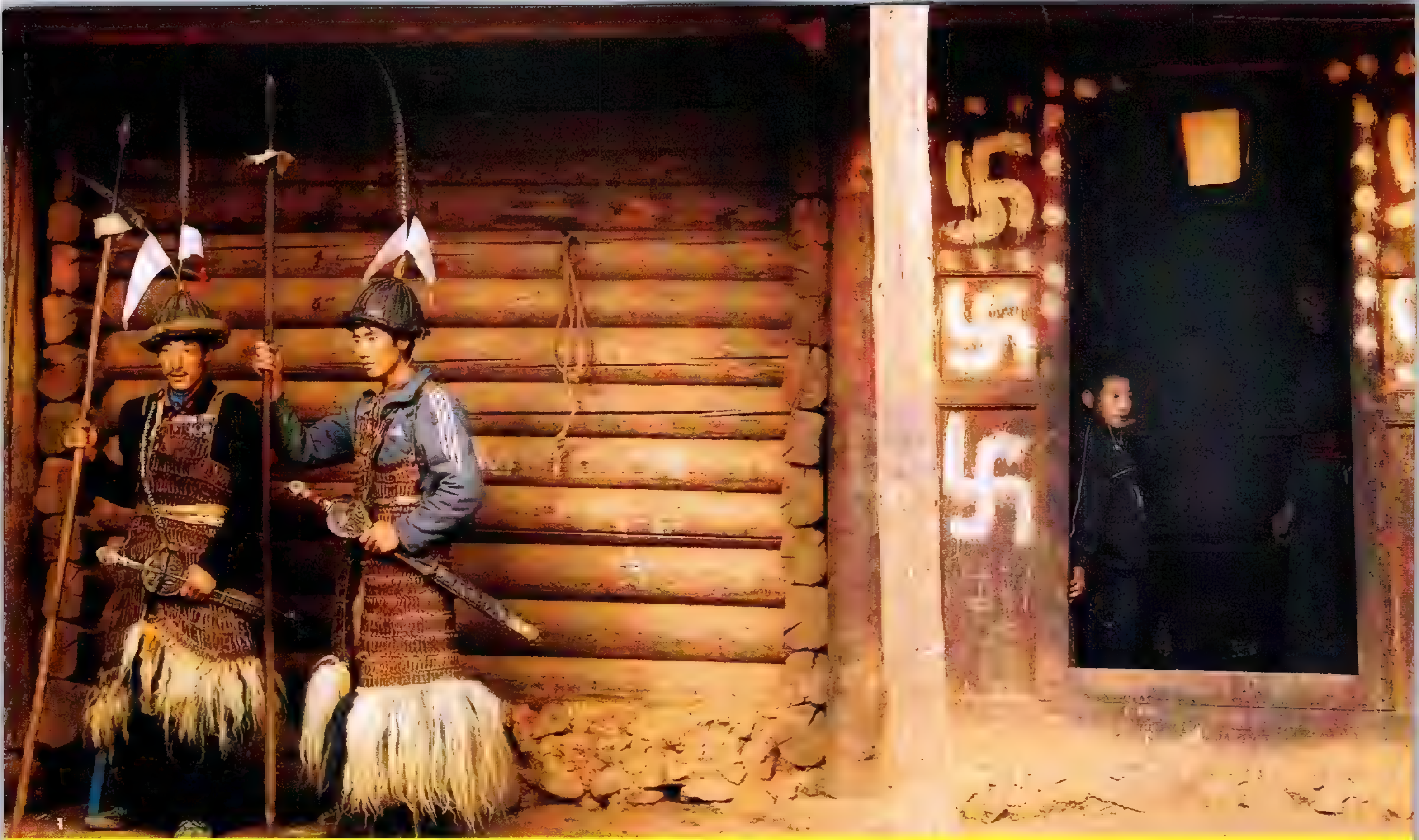
2. Azhima (left), at 12 the oldest daughter, is expected to act as housekeeper for her large family. Her mother thinks school is useless, but the little girl often slips into the village school during class time.

3. Potatoes are the villagers' main produce and staple food.

4. Village women, who have never been out of the mountains, had their first gynaecological check-ups on November 4, 2004.

5. The villagers of Lijiazui have only one harvest a year. By letting the fields lay fallow the rest of the time, they can guarantee the next harvest.

6. After the autumn harvest comes the pig-slaughtering season. Before the pigs are killed, the Mosuo hold a ceremony to worship their ancestors.



The Mosuo believe that a person's soul will never vanish. Death in one place signifies the beginning of a new life in a different place.

1. Two warriors in heavy armour stand at the gate of the dead person's family, to symbolically disperse evil spirits.

2. After the high monk fixes the time and place for the cremation, other lamas draw a Buddhist city on the ground, towards which the lamas chant sutras and ask the God of Earth to allow the dead to use this piece of land for the moment.

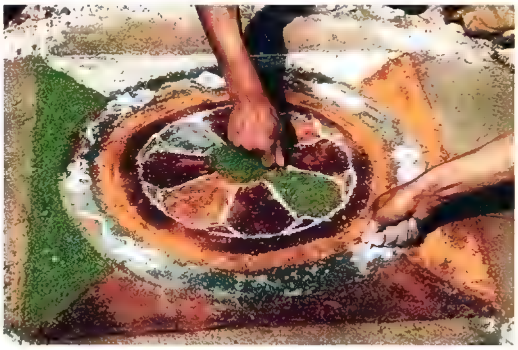
3. The villagers bid farewell to the dead after the fire is lit, but they must leave quickly to avoid taking the dead person's soul home with them or having their own souls taken by the dead.

the 13th year to the day of death, is the lifetime one spends in our world.

The third part, from death onward, represents a new life's journey.

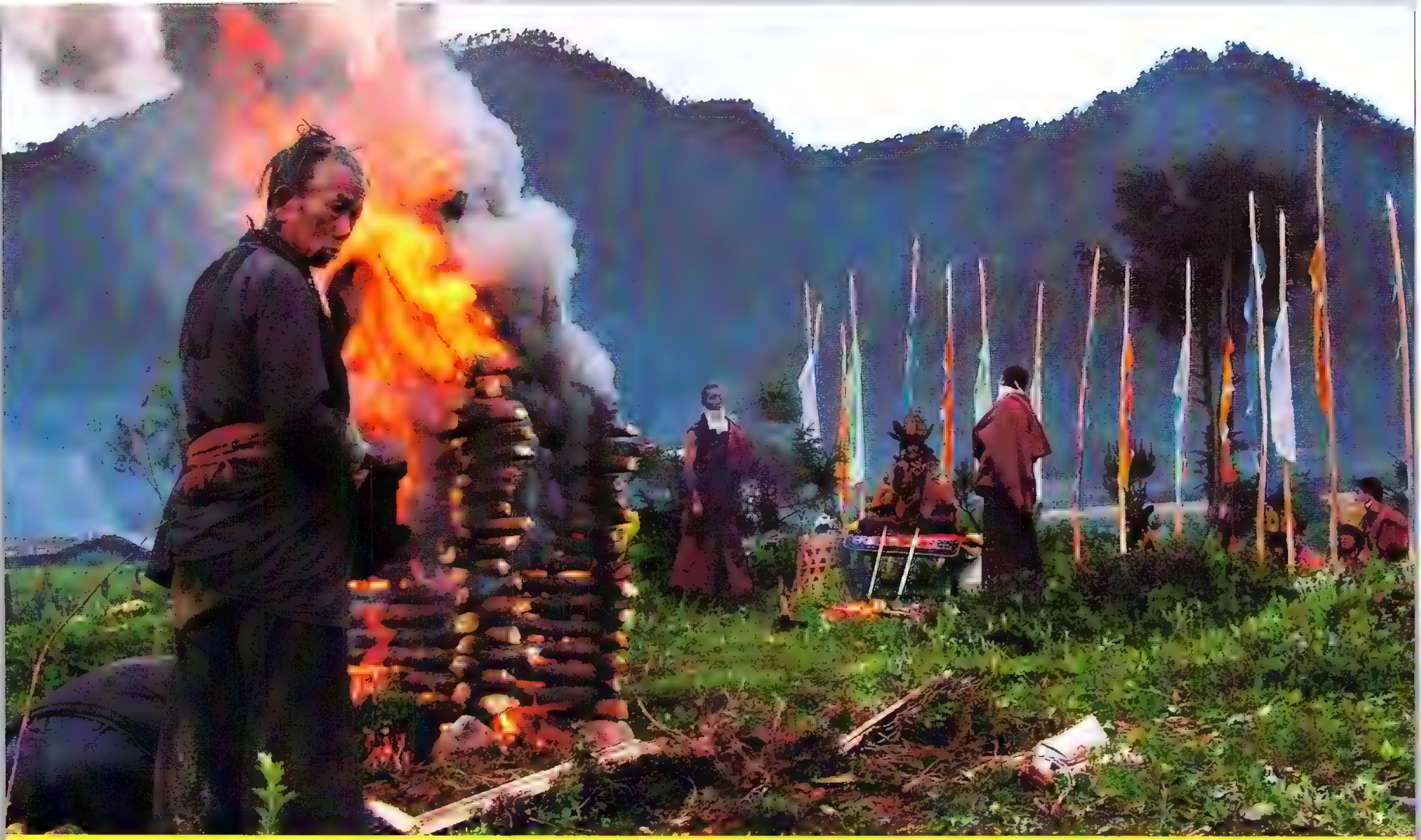
After a Mosuo dies, the body is bound in the foetal position and placed in a coffin before cremation. This is to prevent breaking the link between the soul and the new life. The Mosuo erect neither graves nor memorial tablets for the dead. They simply spread the ashes on the mountain or bury them under a tree. They believe that a person's soul will never vanish, and death simply means leaving behind the fleshy body, which serves as the shelter of the soul. Death in one place signifies the beginning of a new life in a different place. The family usually spend a lot of money to hold a decent funeral because they strongly believe this can help the soul return to its place of origin, where a new life will begin.

At midnight on the fifth day of the fourth lunar month in 2004, fireworks announced a death in the Ruanjia family. The 84-year-old Cili Duma had died in the family's ancestral hall.



Afterwards, it was a peculiar funeral. During the main three days, the *dabas* and lamas each carried out their respective religious duties. The scale of a funeral depends on a family's economic situation. In Cili Duma's case, 17 lamas and nine *dabas* were invited. Dibi and Mupa, the village's most revered senior *dabas*, played the roles of general director and major sutra chanter respectively. A more gorgeous funeral has rarely been seen.

On the third day, when the cremation was due to take place, the ceremony reached its climax. Before daybreak, at the moment decreed by the lama, the body was carried out of the cell where it had been kept for 20 days and placed into the coffin. The *daba* then spoke to the dead body, telling her not to remain tied to the human world any longer, that she had nothing to worry about and should concentrate on following the ancestors' routes back to their origin. Her sons, daughters and other relatives hung hadas (white scarves to bless the deceased) that they had prepared on her coffin to make her journey pleasant. In the courtyard, all the funeral attendants knelt down in a line to allow the coffin to be carried over their heads, which symbolized them carrying the dead on their backs. Finally, to the sounds of fireworks, gongs and drums, the sad music of the suona and much wailing, eight strong young men, all born under the



A total of 40,000 yuan was spent on the three-day funeral, which meant that the family would have to work hard for several years to clear the huge debt.

same Chinese zodiac sign as the dead woman, carried the coffin to the site for cremation. All the villagers followed the procession.

When they reached the cremation platform, the pall-bearers made three clockwise turns with the coffin. The coffin was then broken and the body taken out and set on the pile of wood, facing the presiding lama. The villagers tossed wine, cakes, tea and candies onto the pile, as a way of asking the dead to take these things along with her and give them to their ancestors in the other world.

Suddenly, several men rushed towards the coffin and smashed it open with axes. I was even more shocked to see the men handle the body to take it out of the coffin.

Now it was time to ignite the pyre. Women, who were allowed to watch from a distance, now had to stop crying and retreat, so that the chanting of Buddhist sutra would not be disturbed. As soon as the fire was lit, the villagers kowtowed to bid farewell to the dead. They then left the site quickly, in order not to take the soul of the dead back to their homes and to avoid their own souls being taken away by her.

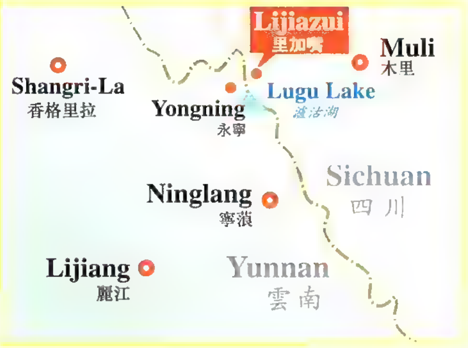
A total of 40,000 yuan was spent on the three-day funeral, on such items as 18 joints of pork, 18 jars of rice wine, 250 kilograms of alcohol, 70 cartons of cigarettes, 550 kilograms of rice, 450 packs of brick tea, 700 metres of linen, and 11,000 yuan in cash for the 17 lamas and seven dabas. The lamas in the first three seats were given a horse, an ox and a sheep, respectively. Most of the items were borrowed from other households, which meant that the family, which earns an annual income of less than 2,000 yuan, would have to work hard for several years to clear the huge debt.

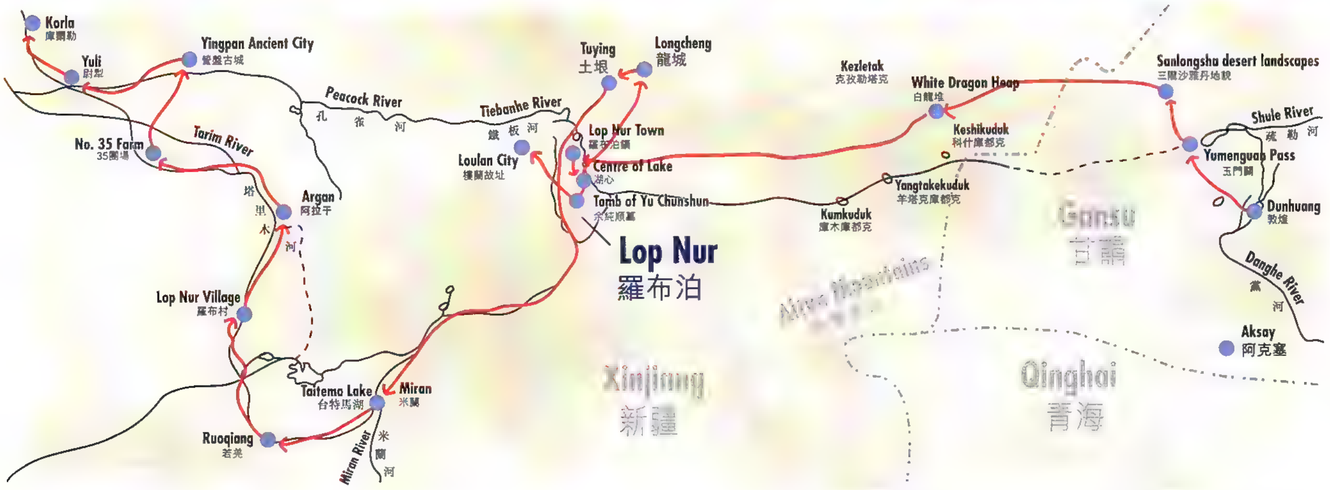
Translated by Gloria Shang

Getting to Lijiazui

Take a bus from Lijiang to Ninglang and change to another bus to Lugu Lake. From here you have to hitch a ride. It takes around an hour to reach Yongning. One more lift may take you to Tuoci Village, from where you must walk for a whole day to cross 12 ridges before finally reaching the village of Lijiazui. Hence, we do not recommend going alone.

There is no lodging in the village. To stay in a farmer's house, you have to know how to communicate with the villagers, as the author does, and you should be ready for the inconvenient conditions, including the lack of hygiene facilities.



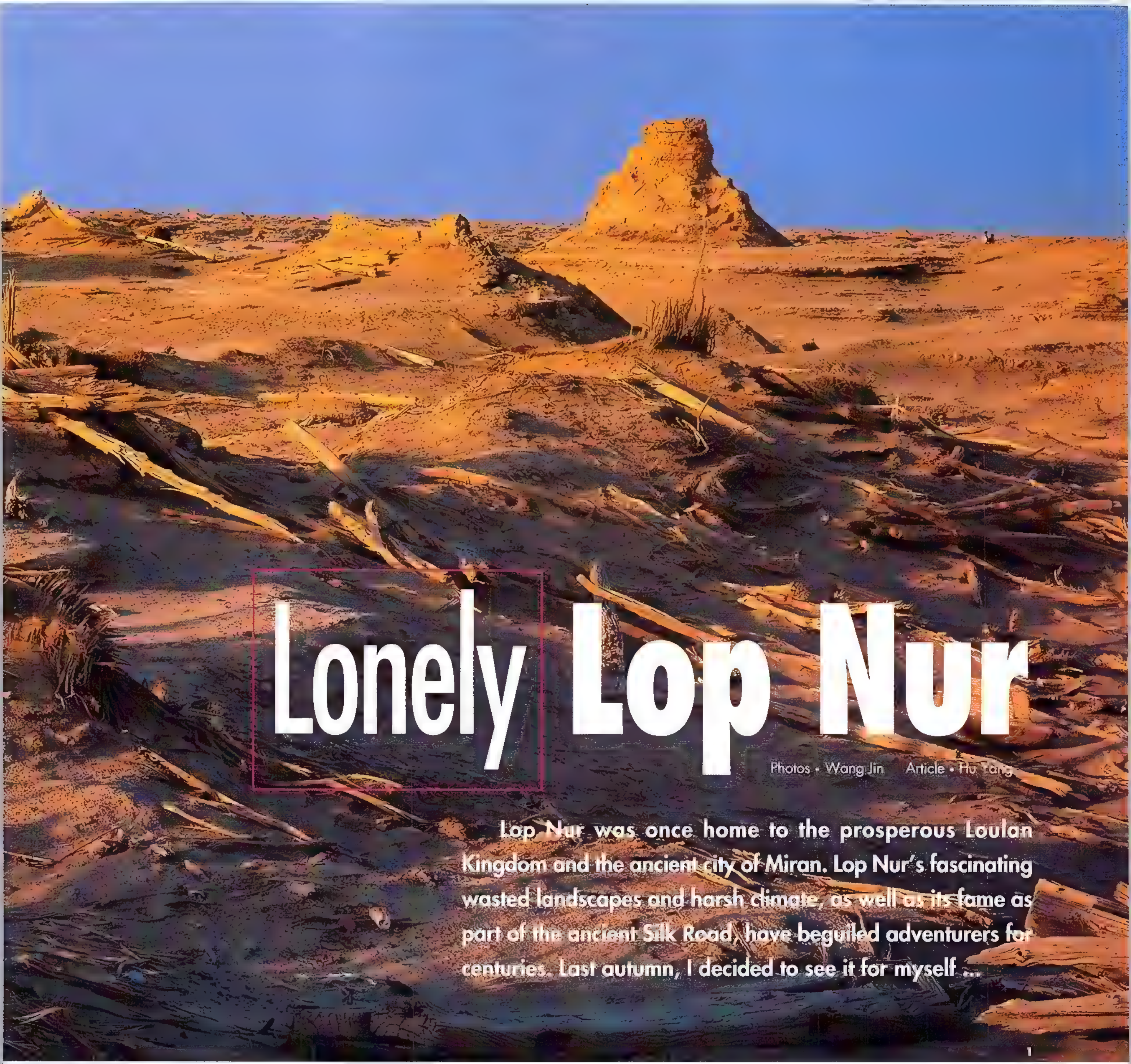

Korla
庫爾勒
Yuli
尉犁
Yingpan Ancient City
營盤古城
No. 35 Farm
35團場
Tarim River
塔里木河
Argan
阿拉干
Peacock River
孔雀河
Tiebanhe River
鐵板河
Tuying
土垠
Longcheng
龍城
Lop Nur Town
羅布泊鎮
Loulan City
樓蘭故址
Centre of Lake
湖心
Tomb of Yu Chunshun
余純順墓
Lop Nur
羅布泊
Lop Nur Village
羅布村
Taitema Lake
台特馬湖
Miran
米蘭
Miran River
米蘭河
Ruoqiang
若羌
Xinjiang
新疆
Kezletak
克孜勒塔克
White Dragon Heap
白龍堆
Keshikuduk
科什庫都克
Yangtakekuduk
羊塔克庫都克
Kumkuduk
庫木庫都克
Altun Mountains
Sanlongsha desert landscapes
三隴沙雅丹地貌
Shule River
疏勒河
Yumenguan Pass
玉門關
Dunhuang
敦煌
Danghe River
黨河
Aksay
阿克塞
Gansu
甘肅
Qinghai
青海

Exploration Route of the Author

Lonely Lop Nur

Photos • Wang Jin Article • Hu Yang

Lop Nur was once home to the prosperous Loulan Kingdom and the ancient city of Miran. Lop Nur's fascinating wasted landscapes and harsh climate, as well as its fame as part of the ancient Silk Road, have beguiled adventurers for centuries. Last autumn, I decided to see it for myself ...



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As early as the 2nd century BC, the world was clamouring for Chinese silks and silk products for their superior craftsmanship. Traders passing through Lop Nur at the time would have encountered natural fountains and ponds. A thousand years later, by the time some Western explorers arrived, Lop Nur had transformed into a vast expanse of saline-alkali land and empty desert, with only the remains of dilapidated ancient cities to greet them. Lop Nur again attracted the world's attention in the 1960s when an atomic bomb was successfully detonated in this now desolate wasteland. But it seems Lop Nur has been far from lonely in recent years.

In the Boundless Gobi

We started our trip on October 1, 2005. On our way to Luobu Town, we passed through yardang (or

1. The boundless Gobi desert and the saline-alkali land of Lop Nur create an eerie landscape.

2. In 1934, the Swedish explorer Sven A Hedin conducted research by taking a dugout canoe out onto Lop Nur Lake. (stock photo)

yadan, which are hillocks formed by long-term wind and water erosion) and desert landscapes including Sanlongsha, crescent sand dunes, Bailongdui (White Dragon Heap) and Hongshijing, and drove along the east banks of Lop Nur Lake. The whole route covered a total of 260 km.

After lunch we took a trip around the mountains. Although they are not that high, they run for a long unbroken stretch. These are the famous Altun Mountains with their continuously changing colours. At first they appeared to be grey, then black and finally dark green, which we were told is caused by copper deposits deep in the rock.

Sunrise from My Feet

The gorge at the Altun Mountains was piled high with sand and stones washed up by floods. The mountain path was tortuous and at such a steep incline that our vehicle crept along as slowly as an old ox pulling a rickety cart. After an hour's drive we finally arrived at the east bank of Lop Nur Lake, but it was so dark that we could not see anything but the dense hillocks under the faint moonlight. Still, the study group were thrilled and happy that we had reached Lop Nur Lake at last.

The roads at Lop Nur make for the most difficult driving experience in the world. Providing varying levels of discomfort are the washboard road, massage road, car-disassembling road and suffocation road, as we came to call them. The washboard road is covered with bumps and holes. The massage road is even bumpier, rocking the vehicle almost continuously. The disassembling road is so bone-jarring that it would leave ordinary cars wrecked after a very short distance. The suffocation road, meanwhile, is bounded by the wheel-high choking dust of the alkali soil that makes you feel claustrophobic as you drive along. From the moment we arrived we travelled along these roads of one form or another. After just an hour of being bounced around in the vehicle, we all suffered from aching joints.

That night the study group camped in the yardang groups, 40 km from Lop Nur Town. Early the next morning we sat atop a yardang to watch the sunrise, our legs stretched out in front of us, feet level with the

1. Visitors must be properly equipped to travel through Lop Nur.

2. Today only a few crumbling Buddhist pagodas and temples remain at the ruins of Miran in the Gobi desert.

1

2

horizon. Lop Nur Lake is huge and stretches as far as the eye can see. The monochrome expanse of the salt marsh made the horizon seem even further away than it really was. After gazing into the distance for awhile, our eyes grew tired. Then it seemed as if the sun rose from just behind my outstretched foot. It started as a rosy glow that gradually widened and became even brighter until this red ball of a sun leapt from behind my feet and quickly spread a thin red veil across the lake.

Silk Road and Lop Nur

The old Silk Road extended from the Gansu Corridor to the vast Gobi desert and on to Lop Nur. The ancient cities of Loulan, Miran and Niyan were all once famous and important commercial cities providing vital communication lines along the trade route. A wealth of carved figures, murals, golden and silver vessels, glass objects and porcelain ware have been unearthed here, by both archaeologists and looters, over the years. The ruins and excavations of these great cities and what remains of their palaces, tombs, temples and grottoes, reflects the civilization of Lop Nur in various ways. Lop Nur truly was the most splendid stop on the ancient Silk Road.

About Lop Nur

Lop Nur, the largest lake in Xinjiang, is also known as Lopnor Nur, meaning "a lake where many rivers meet". In the *History of the Han Dynasty* it was described as a vast area 150 km long and wide with ample water in both winter and summer. At the time it covered an area of at least 5,000 ~ 6,000 sq km. During the Northern Wei Dynasty (386—534) the lake began to shrink. By the Sui and Tang dynasties (581—907), the lake had become even smaller. By the end of the Qing Dynasty (1611—1911) its length from east to west was reduced to 40 ~ 45 km. The *Xinjiang Geomorphology* published in 1942 recorded the lake's area at 2,520 sq km. By 1966 it stretched a mere 100 km from north to south and only 3 ~16 km from east to west.

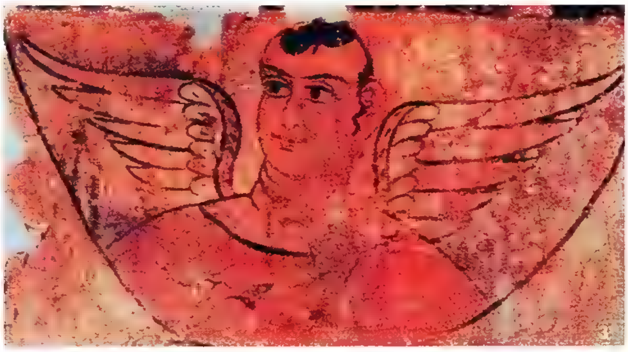
Lop Nur's transformation into a uniquely harsh environment, with its extremely hot temperatures, dry, fierce winds, prevalent sands, yardang and uninhabitable salt marshes, seems designed to keep people away. Annual precipitation is less than 10 mm and in some places there can be no rain at all for several successive years. But its evapotranspiration rate is 3,000 mm, several hundred times that of any precipitation.

The Smallest Town in China

After watching the sunrise we headed to the Loulan ruins by way of Lop Nur Town, the old town of Dashizi (Big Cross), two centres of Lop Nur Lake, and the grave of Yu Chunshun.

Lop Nur Town is the only administrative organization for this area. For years its office was a small building of iron sheeting and only two or three staff worked there. This has been replaced by a two-storey building and a large-scale sylvite (a mineral made of potassium chloride) factory as well. It may well be the smallest town in China as there was no trace of any other human habitation within a 200-metre circumference. After lunch in the town we continued on to Dashizi.

It's 45 km from Dashizi to the lake's centre. The road was not bad except for some five kilometres of massage surface. An engineer surveyed the lake at the end of 1997 to determine its centre. In 1998 a young female explorer from Guangdong erected a wooden tablet here to commemorate her visit and now there are nearly 20 tablets at the lake recording the allegiance of those who have trekked to Lop Nur.



1. Miran is now just a series of scattered haystack-shaped mounds.

2. Yu Chunshun was famous for walking across China. He died in Lop Nur just as he was about to finish crossing it on foot.

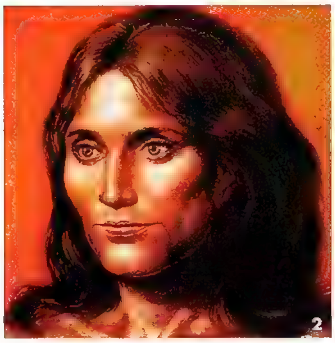
3. Marc Aurel Stein removed several cultural relics from the Miran ruins in 1906, including this painting of a winged angel.

The grave of Yu Chunshun, an avid Hong Kong traveller who died during a trek across Lop Nur, is 12 km from the second centre of Lop Nur. A flag-shaped stone marker of red granite identifies his burial place and gives the dates of his birth and death: 1951 – 1996. A bronze bust of Yu Chunshun is also embedded in the stone, which is inscribed with eight lines detailing the eight years he spent travelling around China. A pair of bronzed shoes sits on the edge of the gravestone. The members of the study group bowed deeply at the site in recognition of his many journeys, which ended here. We left the tomb with heavy hearts, the image of his steadfast face and wavy hair lingering in our minds.

Beauties of Loulan

We arrived at the Loulan Cultural Relics Office at night, still some 43 km from the Loulan ruins.

This office was something special; a banner strung between two poles inserted into a pair of mounds was all that announced the office in the daytime and empty green beer bottles had been placed around the mounds, providing the only green visible in the entire area. Director Meng welcomed us warmly and served us several tasty dishes. After our meal we were taken to our "hotel", which is mainly used as the office's storehouse. As soon as we entered, our hair stood on end as both the kang and the floor were covered with piles of dried human



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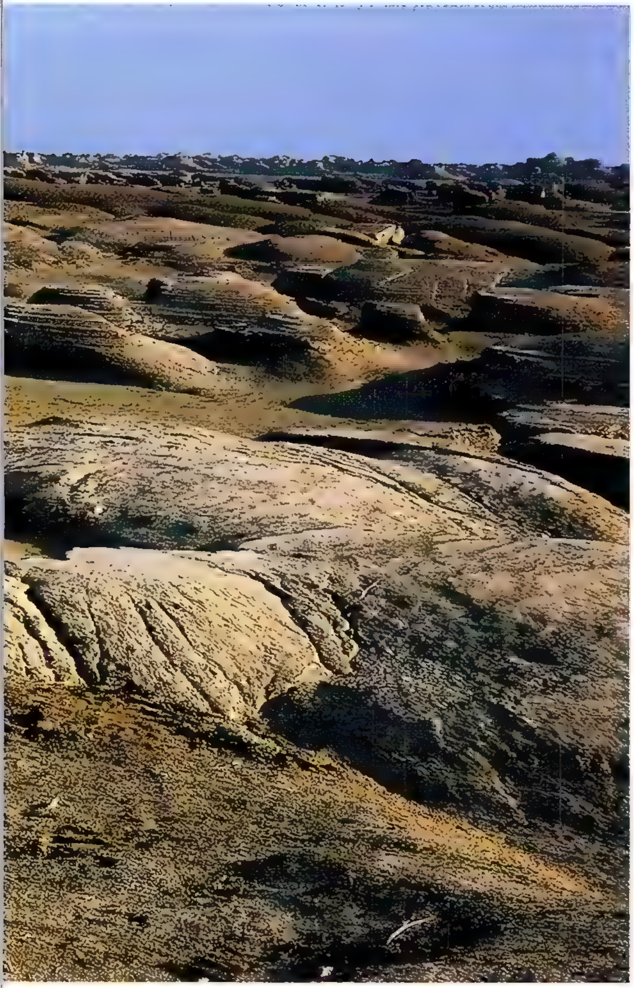


Ancient Loulan City

The famed city of Loulan in western Lop Nur was a crucial stop along the ancient Silk Road. It was the first stop along the route where silk, tea, horses, grapes, jewels and pearls could be traded. The Loulan Kingdom, founded in 176 BC and destroyed in 630, has an 800-year-old history. The kingdom extended to Guyang Pass in the east, the city of Niya in the west, the Altun Mountains in the south and Hami in the north. Over time the kingdom gradually disappeared, leaving no clues to the reason for its demise.

In Zhang Qian's report to Emperor Wu Di of the Han Dynasty in 126 BC, Loulan and Gushi are said to have had city walls close to the salt lake. In the Records of the Historian, Zhang Qian clearly states that both the Loulan and Gushi states had cities near the salt lake (referring to Lop Nur Lake). But no books recorded the precise location of Loulan, so for nearly a thousand years no one knew where it was. Then, in 1990, Sven Aders Hedin (1865—1952), a Swedish explorer, and Ardic, a Uygur from Xinjiang, rediscovered it.

Located amidst the dense yardang terrain, the ancient city was laid out in an irregular square shape with an east city wall measuring about 333 metres, a south wall of 329 metres and west and north walls measuring 327 metres each. The city wall was built using rammed earth, similar to the building method used to construct the section of the Great Wall built during the Han Dynasty near Dunhuang. The city's tallest building was the Buddhist pagoda, which stood at a height of 10.4 metres in the eastern part of the city. The pagoda was built of earthen bricks and wood. Stein and other explorers found sculptures, elegant decorative boards and wood carvings at the site. At the same time several shards of thick pottery, broken millstones, broken wooden casks and various coins, rings, earrings and pieces of wooden strips with the ancient Han-dynasty language written on them were also found at the site.

corpses. Meng told us they were the famous Loulan beauties and explained that we were privileged to be allowed to stay the night with them. Our cold tents suddenly seemed warm and inviting.

The crow of a cock woke us early the next morning and we left for Loulan. The vehicle was forced to proceed at just 20 km per hour because the road was littered with potholes. And this was the better section of the road. The next 18 km were the most difficult we drove on, but for the first time since we'd arrived five or six days before, we saw vegetation on the sand hills and some dried Chinese tamarisk shrubs.

Although it was October the weather was still a hot and stuffy 35°C, so it felt extremely unpleasant in the vehicle since we had to keep the windows closed. The road was full of potholes filled with the floury saline-alkali soil. When you first breathe in the soil it makes your mouth pucker until you eventually feel that you will suffocate. Some 18 km later we arrived at Loulan. The site was fenced in by iron palings and mound-like structures were scattered here and there. We might have mistaken it for a yardang group if not for the information the guide from the office had given us.

The ancient city of Loulan was once an important economic and political centre in the early years of the Loulan Kingdom. Its disappearance remains a mystery that so far no one has been able to unravel. Under the strong sunlight the city ruins looked even more enigmatic. Some parts of the rammed earth city wall had collapsed but you could still work out its former shape. There was a separate gap in both the north and south wall which appeared to be two city gates standing opposite one another. What would have been the urban area was basically a square covering an area of 100,000 square metres with a 10-metre tall Buddhist pagoda on the east side of the city centre.

Goodbye, Loulan

Today all that remains of Loulan is the Buddhist pagoda and three ancient government official mansions. As we entered the site we saw the dried up crisscrossing irrigation canals and boundless sand. Timbers, which turned out to be poplar wood, were piled up on the higher places. Near the building we came upon curious circles of poplar or reed. The Loulan people who inhabited the area 1,700 years ago were said to follow a custom of planting three trees whenever a baby was born. The baby's family planted one for their child's future children, one was to

1. From the remains of earthen bricks and decayed rafters we can get an idea of how Lop Nur's buildings once looked.

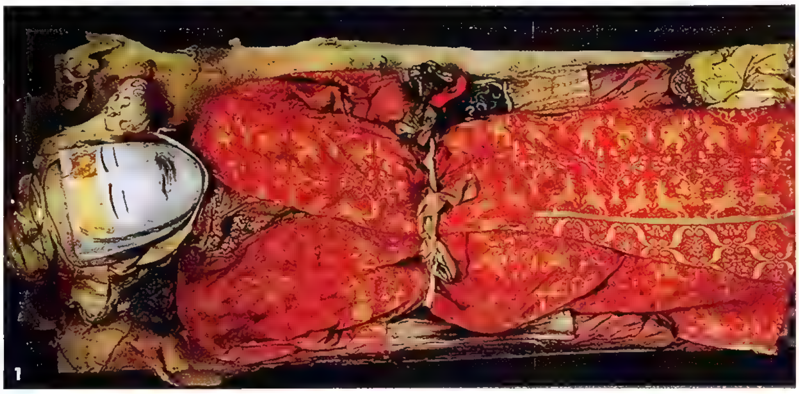
2. The ancient city of Loulan was extremely important at its peak, but it disappeared suddenly. This is an artist's rendition of a Loulan beauty.

3. The dried, preserved corpse of a Loulan woman.

1. This corpse was found in the barracks.
2. The old Han barracks is the only site preserved intact in the Lop Nur area. The group of graves here is the largest in the area.
3. The Tarim River, the longest inland river in China, flows from west to east round the Taklamakan Desert. It once nurtured Loulan civilization by flowing into Lop Nur Lake.
4. A journey to Lop Nur brought valuable memories to our hard-working study group.

be used to make his or her own coffin and one to serve as a post marking his or her future grave. Knowing this made it easy to recognize gravesites.

According to legend, Loulan disappeared long, long ago when a devil came to the ancient city and stirred up a violent sandstorm that lasted three days and nights, blowing away all the trees and houses and crops. Even the courses of the rivers were changed and the people were buried under the sand. Moreover, the devil was said to have provoked war among the tribes that left dead bodies scattered all over and fields drenched with blood. Finally, the devil supposedly brought a deadly plague to the area to ensure that Loulan was thoroughly destroyed.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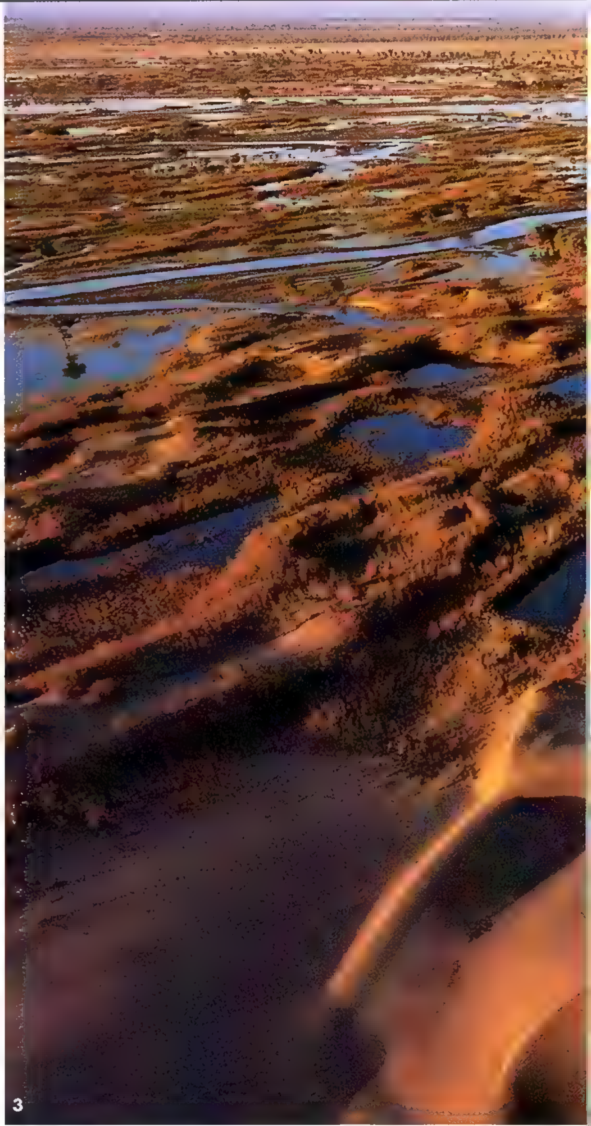
About Yu Chunshun

Yu Chunshun (1951—1996) decided to walk across China and started his first trip on July 1, 1988. In all, he trekked some 40,000 km, visiting 23 provinces and municipalities, all on foot, and he was the first and only person to walk the Sichuan-Tibet, Qinghai-Tibet, Xinjiang-Tibet, Yunnan-Tibet and China-Nepal highways by himself. Sadly, he died of dehydration in the extreme heat of June 1996 just as he was about to finish walking across Lop Nur in Xinjiang. He died in the northwest section of Lop Nur, about 160 km from the place where Peng Jiamu, a famous Chinese scientist, disappeared in 1980. Lop Nur's history is steeped in bad luck and in the past many people met a horrifying end there. The whole place is shrouded in foreboding mystery.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Murals of Miran

Early on the morning of October 6 we made our way to the ancient site of Miran. The city's ruins are located in the Gobi Desert two kilometres east of the 36th regiment, second farm division in Ruoqiang County. The place is known for its Buddhist structures, its garrison and military forts. We could make out the remnants of eight haystack-shaped pagodas and three temples all made of mud-brick but most of these were falling apart and some had even been levelled to the ground.

According to records, Miran was located in the Shanshan state, which first appeared in the history books from the early Han Dynasty and the Wei Kingdom (c.206 BC — 265). The books described the area as being covered in desert and saline-alkali land with only sparse plant life. The people were said to have lived a semi-nomadic life; only some of them farmed for a living. The inhabitants of the small desert state were local aborigines (who spoke a language similar to that of the Kuqa and Yanqi), Indians and people from the central plain. The tribes inhabiting the northeast Tibet Plateau once had some influence in this area in the early centuries.

Turn-of-the-century explorer Marc Aurel Stein, who made eight major Silk Road expeditions, once excavated several cultural relics from the site,

including some of the most valuable ancient paintings, such as the Miran murals of the Shanshan state, in 1906. He also took eight murals depicting "angels with wings" and others from the Buddhist pagodas and temples, as well as a huge clay sculpture of a Buddha head and items typical of the Gandhara style of art. The murals, which date back to the third and fourth centuries AD, were the earliest murals found in Xinjiang and though they had Buddhist themes, they also showed elements of Indian, Greek and even Iranian and Mediterranean handiwork.

Lop Nur — Desolate Land

During our trip to Lop Nur we heard about explorers and visitors who died in this remote area. They seemed having no fear in exploring to this abandoned land — to say more accurately, a land being curse.

However you look at it, the awesome sight of the boundless Lop Nur Lake is terrifying. Winter in Lop Nur, when the temperature drops to about -40°C, has been compared to hell since there is not a blade of grass on the ground, nor a bird in the sky. In the summer temperatures reach 70°C and fierce winds howl like huge packs of wild animals baying all at once. At such times, visibility can be less than three metres, making it impossible for anyone to cross Lop Nur; it would take at least half a month to cross the several hundred-kilometre salt marsh in such abysmal conditions.

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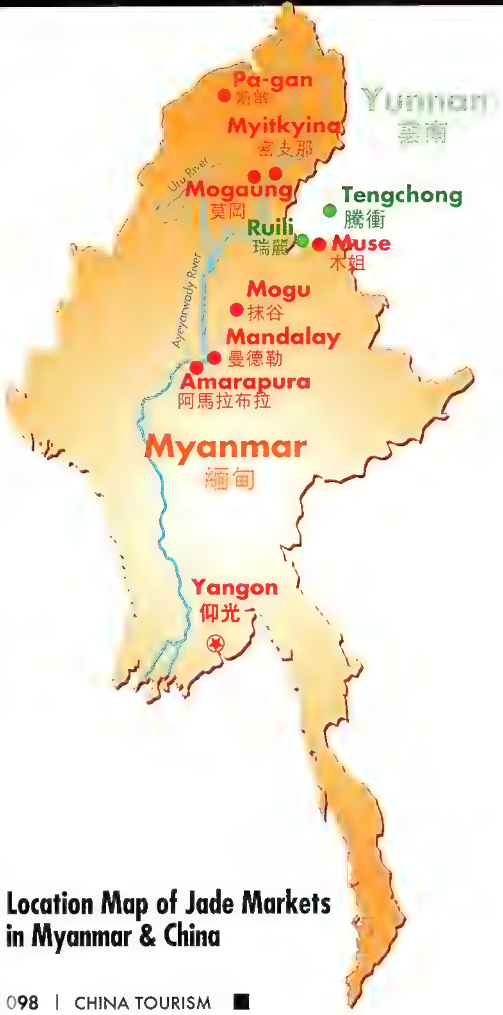
This trip has not only left me unforgettable memories, but also inspired me greatly. People who have been to Lop Nur will never forget it; those who are there right now will be sighing; those who have not yet been live in hope of seeing it one day.

Translated by Wang Zengfen


Pa-gan
帕敢
Myitkyina
密支那
Yunnan
雲南
Uru River
Mogaung
莫岡
Tengchong
騰衝
Ruili
瑞麗
Muse
木姐
Ayeyarwady River
Mogu
抹谷
Mandalay
曼德勒
Amarapura
阿馬拉布拉
Myanmar
緬甸
Yangon
仰光

Location Map of Jade Markets in Myanmar & China

The Last Rays of Jade

Photos • Guan Haitong Article • Sun Min

No other precious stone is as highly valued in Chinese culture than jade. Ever since the Qin and Han dynasties 2,000 years ago, royals and nobles used jade as their burial robes, wrapping the corpse of kings and queens in plates of jade tied together with gold wire. From the ornaments of emperors down to the earrings and bracelets of commoners, jade has been seen as a symbol of good fortune, power and luxury in Chinese culture as well as a gifted object capable of warding off ghosts, evil and back luck.

1. Judging the quality of jade is not an exact science but a method of comparison and description performed by only the most experienced of experts.

2. This road was built between Ruili in Yunnan and Myanmar during the Second World War along one of the ancient roads transporting jade to China over centuries.

Jade is divided into soft and hard types. The most precious jade is the hard type called "jadeite" which is also known as "the king of jade". Of all kinds of jade, jadeite is the hardest to be found and the one with the least quantity of known deposits. For hundreds of years, jadeite from the northern part of Myanmar (Burma) has been known as the highest quality of rare jade and like the jadeite itself, travelling through the area is an experience in Oriental exoticism and mystery.

Beginnings of the Jade Road

On the 298-kilometre road from the Muse Port on the southwest edge of China's Yunnan Province to Mandalay in Myanmar, there are four checkpoints. At each checkpoint our guide and interpreter A Li would take our flimsy forms with a photo attached into the wooden hut for a stamp from the local official. Only with a stamp from the official could we progress to the next checkpoint. Then would come the officials from the customs, immigration, drug department and police to check our luggage.

"For what?" I asked our driver. He replied: "Cars going south as checked for drugs, cars going north are checked for jade."

The winter sun stung our eyes through the dust kicked up by the officials' sandals.

At this moment I discovered I was on the old commercial road leading from China west to the land of Zen. Two thousand years ago, when an imperial envoy named Zhang returned from the western regions to the capital of China and reported he had traveled through Sichuan and Yunnan along a "Sichuan-India road" to reach India, he must have been talking of this road. At the time, Zhang reported that the road was mainly used to transport everyday wares of the common people. Little did he know, a millennia later in the Yuan and Ming dynasties the road would be used to transport a far more precious ware — jade from northern Burma.

The governor of British Burma Charles Crosthwaiter wrote in 1912: "The fine green precious stone was discovered by chance in north Burma in the 13th century by a merchant from Yunnan. The merchant used a rock he had found to weigh his scales, and it was soon revealed to be the most precious of jadeite." When this story was circulated, a mining rush soon followed, however it was quickly killed off by malaria or local intransigence. "Only in the later half of the 18th century did adventurous Chinese merchants finally settles down to mine jadeite at a discovery site on the right bank of the Uru River. From this time, a small but regular trade of jadeite passed through the region into Yunnan, along those treacherous mountain roads."

Although the story about the Yuan Dynasty merchant appeared in the English reports only once, Chinese scholars

1. The Mandalay jade market is the most exciting place in the city.

2. May Myo is two hours drive from Mandalay and retains many features of its former life under the British colonists.

believe the discovery came much earlier: "By the time of the Yuan Dynasty, the jade industry in Myanmar was not just beginning, in fact it had already reached a peak."

We have no exact evidence when jadeite began to be mined in Myanmar, but the story is like the stone itself — full of mystery and legend.

Jade Business in Mandalay

Even under the winter sun, Mandalay was still 30 degrees. Mandalay is still the world's largest centre for jade manufacturing, transport and sales.

I came to Mandalay to look for a man called Ao Wen. Unfortunately he was at the jade factory but his brother Ao Mi was in. The two brothers share the mining and cutting of jade and run a shop called "Fu Mei Jade". Their parents came from Yunnan, what else, for the jade.

Ao Mi's jade cutting factory is located about 20 km out of Mandalay and is surrounded by an orchard chock full of lychee and mango trees. Poor grade jade is fashioned into pendants and trinkets by local women while Chinese workers cut the finer grade jade. I noticed that there were plenty of books strewn around — all of them on jade masterpieces recovered from Han dynasty graves.

Clumps of stone lay around the workshop covered in thick blankets. Some blocks had already been cut open, some only drilled with holes. Untouched blocks of jade were called "Blind Guys" and buying and selling "Blind Guys" was called "Gambling Rock". Gambling rock was once the most exciting part of the jade industry, but Ao Mi says that today the numbers of peddlers relying on gambling rocks are very few.

At the workshop we met Ao Wen. A little over 30, Ao Wen was born in Myanmar and started work in the jade industry in the 90s. Compared to the older generation, Ao Wen takes a far more practical view of jade — to him, jade is a commercial profession.

Waiting for the Stone Seer

We soon left for Mandalay's jade market. Here, the air was full of the rumbling of diesel generators, the screeching of cutting tools and the high-pitched whine of the hacksaws. From the narrow pathway between wooden huts that were used for jade workshops, all I could see were rows and rows of men hunched over their cutting equipment, only their mouths moving a fraction. This is the most densely settled part of Mandalay; as the British wrote in their report: "Mandalay is the centre of the jade cutting industry and the largest market dominating the jade precious stone industry."

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From what I could see all of the stones being cut here were not of any high quality. And no wonder — one could imagine it would be rare for traders to cut into a untouched block of stone under the gaze of so many of their counterparts. And any stone of real value would be unlikely to find its way into this loud and raucous market.

Waiting really is the game in the jade industry. Even with so many workers carving away at the stone blocks, a valuable discovery doesn't happen every day. And when a discovery is made, one has to wait for the valuer to make a decision before one can sell. So waiting has turned into Mandalay's second industry. Now there are a number of leisure choices for people waiting to sell: gambling, smoking opium and even playing golf.

Selecting the valuer is also important. High value pieces are only given to valuers who understand the system and who are credible. From the seller's point of view, the more people who value the stone, the less control there is over the final price. This is a psychological tug of war.

There are many unwritten rules in the jade industry. Among the older generation the opening price is a secret. If the seller sets a high opening price, the buyer must not get angry; similarly if the buyer set a low asking price, then the seller cannot get in a huff. Bargaining over the price tests the credibility, judgement and power of both sides. After the opening price has been set, then both sides have two days to consider it. During this time, no party is to touch the stone; if the stone is moved or seen by another party, then the buyer can refuse it. But after the two days if the buyer makes an offer, then he should complete the transaction. This builds a buyer's credibility.

Says Mandalay trader Yang Zhong Wei: "There is propriety in the jade industry. If I accept your price, then you should not turn around and try to sell to someone else for a higher price. I can reject your offer in this regard. If I have given you a price and then dislike it afterwards, it's I who have no credibility. That means the person should get out of the jade business."

An experienced figure in the jade business circle, Yang says that even if he doesn't make any money on the deal once he has given out a price he will not take it back. "Actually I am buying more than jade; I'm buying my reputation. In the future, people will know I am credible and bring good pieces for me to see first."

Since old, high quality pieces have always been a seller's market. Thus, while playing the waiting game, keeping one's reputation is of utmost important. Once you go against your word in this market, there won't be another chance to win it back.

Fated Jade

During my trip on the Jade Road, I heard time and again stories about stones of incredible wealth and their owners. Even one of the managers in the local travel agency told me about the stone discovered by his cousin

weighing in at 158 kilos. When the stone was cut open, it was discovered to have no value at all and was cast aside in the factory's courtyard to be used as a seat.

In the high summer temperatures of Mandalay, jade brings coolness and comfort, but no-one would have expected just how much comfort that piece of jade eventually brought. One day the factory owner was clearing out his stock and sold the useless jade rock to 2 rickshaw driver brothers for 6,000 kyat (about 150 yuan). Just like that, the rock brought an overnight fortune to the rickshaw drivers. The drivers sold the rock for HK$300,000 to a Mandalay merchant. The merchant then sold it for HK$850,000 to a merchant in Guangdong who sold it in Hong Kong for over HK$2 million. The price of the jade is now estimated at HK$12 million.

As Ao Wen says, the jade market relies purely on luck. Even if you dream of wealth, it's up to Heaven to grant it. But perhaps the most puzzling thing about jade is that the chemical make-up of the most valuable and most worthless jade is the same; beauty, and wealth it seems, really is all in the eye of the beholder.

Jade Culture

Even before arriving in Myanmar I had heard of Pa Gan, but we quickly discovered the road was prohibited to foreigners. I called the consulate, but the commercial consular showed me a long list of foreigners who had been caught this year along trying to get through. He told me the reason for the prohibition was due to people using the road to avoid import taxes. Going by sea was much easier for the police to levy duties.

After the 1990s, the Myanmar government began to regulate jade mining. Land was auctioned by the government to registered companies. Only after discoveries have been recorded for tax purposes are they transported to Yangon (Rangoon) for auction and export. Stones that do not get auctioned are allowed to be carved and sold inside Myanmar. Private persons are not permitted to enter the mining areas with the intention of conducting trade.

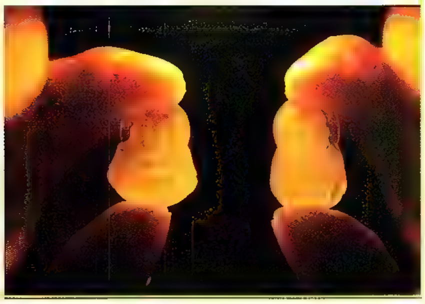
The consul also told us due to ocean transportation, Yunnan no longer had any advantage. Jade was now transported by sea to Hong Kong and Guangdong before being forwarded to Yunnan; thus the jade found in Yunnan is highly priced.

Jade is mined in Myanmar, however the root of jade culture is in Tengchong. But many people do not know that

The Origins of Jadeite

Jadeite refers to the highest grade of quality jade and is produced in five countries: Myanmar, Japan, Russia, Guatemela and USA. However only jadeite found in northern Myanmar between the Uru and Qindun Rivers meets the grade of precious stone.

The occurrence of hard jade happens in extreme conditions: compression of rock material under high pressure at low temperatures. The Tibetan plateau and the mountain ranges of Yunnan are among the world's most geologically complex. The collision between the Euro-Asian and Indian techtonic plates drives up molten rock material from the ocean floor which form crystals under high pressure. Jade mining area in Myanmar such as Myitkyina occur exactly on this fault line between two plates. Early research into jadeite identified its chemical makeup but could not explain its multi-varied colouring. Modern analysis has revealed that pure jade is white while coloured jade is formed with the combination of other chemical elements.



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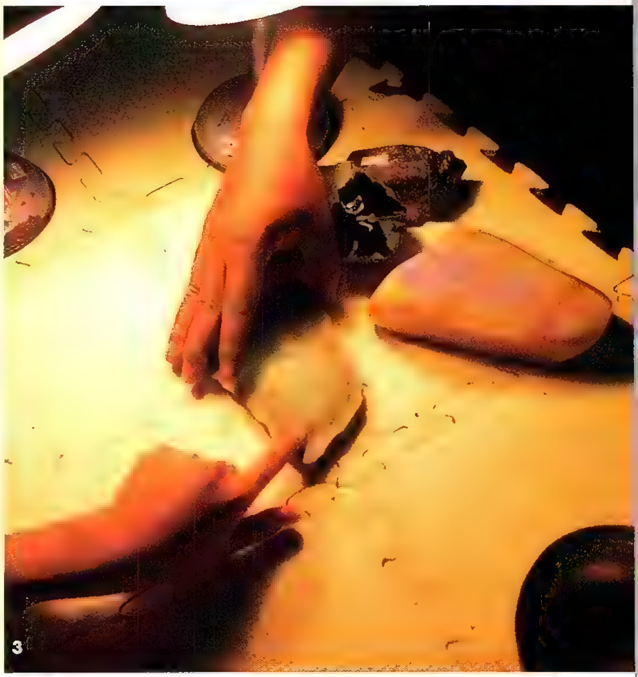

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the jade culture of Tengchong in actual fact stems from the place of jade in Chinese culture and history.

In Tengchong, sellers will not offer you a price. The decision lies entirely with the buyer.

In the ancient Chinese classics, jade is considered to have the virtues of ebenevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and honesty'. In Tengchong, these principles also govern the trade of jade.

Says Taiwanese jade merchant Mr Cai: "They are obsessed with jade in Tengchong. Jade in Tengchong is not a product but a mysterious grassroots culture to pass on between generations."

Even today many of the jade traders from Tengchong still follow the same path their ancestors did to view jade blocks in the factories. We met an old gentleman Mr Ming Wu who has spent 40 years in the workshops. Mr Ming had a trading company in Pa Gan and provided lodging, food and services for those traders from Tengchong without the proper documentation. He told us that records show that people from Tengchong involved in the jade trade can be traced back 10 generations.

This wasn't the first time Pa Gan had been marked as a black spot, and yet adventurers still came forth to try their luck. Insiders say that most of the people on the wanted list are from Yunnan and Guangdong, traders determined to get beyond the trade markets to the jade mines themselves.

Sunset Over the Graves

Adventure comes at a price. In Tengchong I discovered just how much these early adventurers paid the price. On a stone tablet at the entrance to an alley I found these words: "17 new brides, 19 just died." The northern part of Myanmar is often justifiably portrayed as being hellish: tropical climate, thick forests, disease, insects and venomous creatures. The ancients once said of this area: "Of 10 people to cross the barrier, at least half face a certain death."

The graveyard for the Yunnan workers is on the way to Mo Gu, about 20 km from Mandalay. The old burial mound collapsed many years back and the graveyard today is newly built, thus I was unable to see what a graveyard for the 6,000 dead listed in the British records looked like. We arrived as the sun was setting; casting orange shadows over the headstones arranged like a thick forest.

I walked with the caretaker along the rows of headstones. Two thousand headstones told us about the two thousand men who had sacrificed their lives in the jade trade. The old man patted on white headstone and said:

1. Machinery from all periods of history can be found in the Mandalay jade market.

2. In the past most of the jade workers in Mandalay were Chinese; today they are replaced by locals.

3. Jade trading relies on skill, vision and daring.

1. The train to north Myanmar. Jade traders usually take the train to Mogaung and then transfer by road to Pa Gan.

2. Across history, jade trading has been a risky profession. Apart from terrible weather and long journeys, the risk is further exacerbated by theft, betrayal and temptation. This is the final resting ground of workers from Yunnan in a Mandalay cemetrey.

3. A stone block that has been cut open is called 'opening the window'. This way, the risk to buyer and seller is reduced to a minimum.

4. Evaluating jade is the most complex of the jade arts.

"This guy introduced me to work in Myitkyina. I like his headstone the most; it's made from a single block of white jade. This guy was especially unlucky. His jade wares were confiscated and he died of rage. Over there is another old friend; he died in jail also over a jade dispute. We were in the workshop together."

Today we should be grateful to these great pioneers. At the cost of their lives, they built the wealth upon which Tengchong relies today.

The Place where Dreams Begin and End

Whether or not we could get to Pa Gan, at least I was able to get on the train to Myitkyina.

The train slowly wound its way into upper Myanmar. At times the train was so excruciatingly slow I could hear bird calls in the nearby forest. The wheat fields were ripe, the sunflowers vibrant and an ox with a pair of kind brown eyes elegantly walked between the paddy fields.

At exactly 8am, the train stopped for exactly two minutes at He Ping. Transfers to Pa Gan could be made here and seven or eight cars stood by the side of the station ready for passengers. There were monks and common Burmese headed for Pa Gan, but I didn't see any people from Tengchong or Chinese people. I asked the driver how much — 7,000 kyat (about 49 Chinese yuan). It seemed getting to Pa Gan was no longer the mysterious, remote and terrifying adventure that generations of jade seekers had experienced before.

Our train reached Mogaung and again stopped for two minutes. Someone called out "Pa Gan! Pa Gan!" I didn't need the translator to understand. Mogaung has been a crossing point for travelers between Yunnan, Burma and India for centuries and I had heard old men in Tengchong murmur the town's name. Who knew how many dreams had begun here and how many had ended?

An old saying once said: "The poor go to the barbarian lands; the hungry go to the mines." For hundreds of years, people had come here to seek their fortunes. Year after year, day after day, dreams propelled people to come here and look for jade regardless of their safety. But those who have worked the mines know that to realize that dream is virtually impossible. When they reached the mines; there was no way back. Returning empty handed was a nightmare matched only by the nightmare of working in the mines day after day.

Without the flow of travellers from Tengchong, Myitkyina was a much quieter place. The jade trade had moved to Pa Gan and the former jade market was now an ice cream shop. Under the bright moon of the New Lunar Year, the town appeared tired and desolate.

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Jade Appreciation

Judging jade is usually conducted according to the following criteria: "hardness, purity, transparency and shine." In addition there are many abstract criteria used such as "glutinous", "fleshy", "greasy" and a complex system of rankings.

The highest standard jade is said to be: pure green, clear as glass, pure of colour with no flaw in colour or texture and of a certain weight according to its size. For traders, there is no clear pricing mechanism and much relies on the eye of the trader to spot high quality jade.

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Setting Sail

The early morning moon was bright enough to light up the roads of Mandalay. Our boat left dock while still dark. Twenty years ago, people like Yang Zhongwei used this river to transport their precious finds from Mogaung down to Mandalay; a lifetime of dreams riding on two wooden oars.

I could see instantly that Yang Zhongwei was an old expert in the trade. When he was 11, Yang was brought on horseback to Myanmar; when he was 18 he begun working in the Pa Gan mines. In the 1970s and 80s he sold his stones in Thailand for on-sale to China.

Transporting jade in those days was a complex and arduous task. The jade was transported to Mogaung by elephant and hidden at the foot of a mountain range after which it was transported down rives to Mandalay. Then the jade was put onto lorries for transport into Thailand. Yang's biggest ever shipment extended for a week before it arrived safely in Thailand.

Along the way the shipment faced highway robbery, bandits, corruption and theft. After 10 years, Yang retired from the business not because he was tired, but because he had earned enough to buy his own fine jade.

In the early 90s, Myanmar opened up Pa Gan to private commerce and companies from Thailand and Hong Kong began to operate mines and Yang joined in the hunting. In 1995, while Yang was on an inspection trip to a neighbouring mine, a mine employee discovered and made off with the most valuable rock ever found in the mine. By the time Yang got back from his trip it was too late. That rock sold for 7-8 million kyat (around 600,000 yuan). But the on-seller sold it for 40 million yuan to a jade trade who had worked with Yang in Thailand.

The Last Rays of Jade

After hundreds of years of mining, tens of thousands of labourers' efforts and the excavation of mountain after mountain of jade, there is hardly any more jade left to be found on the banks of the Uru River. Many mines now reach as deep as 200 ~ 300 metres. Nowadays all you can hear from the miners' lips is how rare good jade is to find and how the hope of finding real jadeite is more and more an impossibility As the stock of jade reaches exhaustion, more and more people are becoming realistic about the properties of jade and jade is becoming more like a commodity to be exchanged and traded. Perhaps we won't need to wait until all the jade has been extracted before the dream of jade in oriental culture ceases to exist.

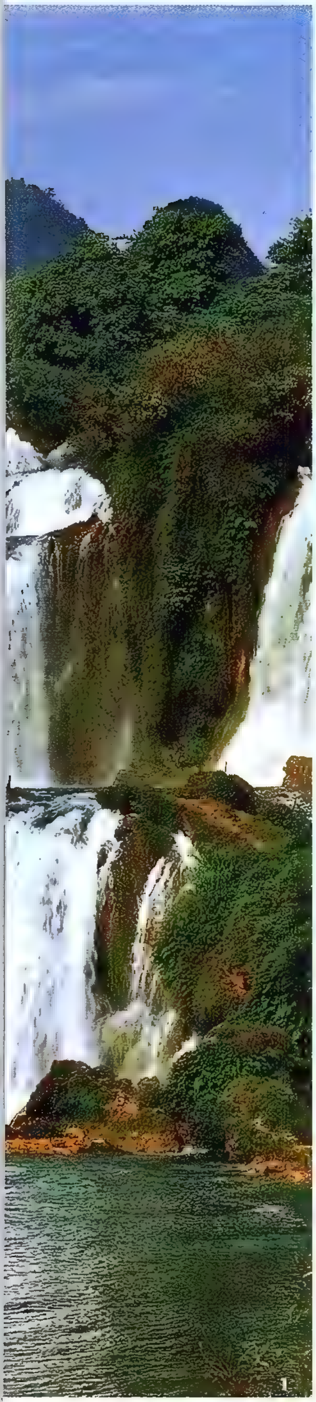
Translated by Bret Sutcliffe

A Leisure Trip to Detian

(Special thanks to Miramar Express and CR Airways)

Photos & Article • Mickey Ching

Turning one's eye towards the Sino-Vietnamese border in Southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the amazingly beautiful Mingshi Scenic Area, Black Water River and Guichun (Returning Spring) River unfurls before the visitor. Our tour guide also explained to us that the Detian Waterfall won the title of "The Most Beautiful Waterfall in China" as selected by China National Geographic.



1. A poetic scene after rain at the Detian Waterfall. (by Chan Yat Nin)

2. Guichun River marks the border of China and Vietnam, while people from both sides of the river live a harmonious life. (courtesy of Detian Travel League)

3. Many Hong Kong TV dramas have been made in Mingshi Scenic Area.

Beautiful Life in a Border City

The weather hadn't changed on our second day. After getting settled, we hurried to the market in Shuolong border town for one of its biggest events. The Detian Waterfall is separated from Vietnam by the Guichun (return to Spring) River, which marks the border of China and Vietnam. People from both sides of the river live a harmonious life. Every second, fifth and eighth day of each lunar month, the Vietnamese people and Guangxi people living along the border gather at the market to sell their local products. I saw women busy weaving the long bamboo baskets in which small local boars are kept when waiting to be sold. These boars were thin and reminded me of a dachshund. Further into the market old people wearing Zhuang ethnic style headbands were selling wild vegetables and fruits. I asked one camera shy woman what she was selling, but she said something in a dialect I couldn't understand. She looked so innocent and kind with her timid smile. Many authentic Vietnamese products such as medicinal oil, bamboo hats, sandals, perfumes and jewelry could be found. Cheap barber shops and deep fried-flour shops were already open to serve customers. We used Cantonese to do all of our bargaining with the merchants. Unlike some other tourist sites, the stain of commercialization has yet to arrive.

Listening to the Waterfall in a Drizzle

On the way to the Detian Waterfall, we passed by some smaller waterfalls. Actually these waterfalls, shaped by the mountain, are an integral part of the Detian Waterfall scenery.

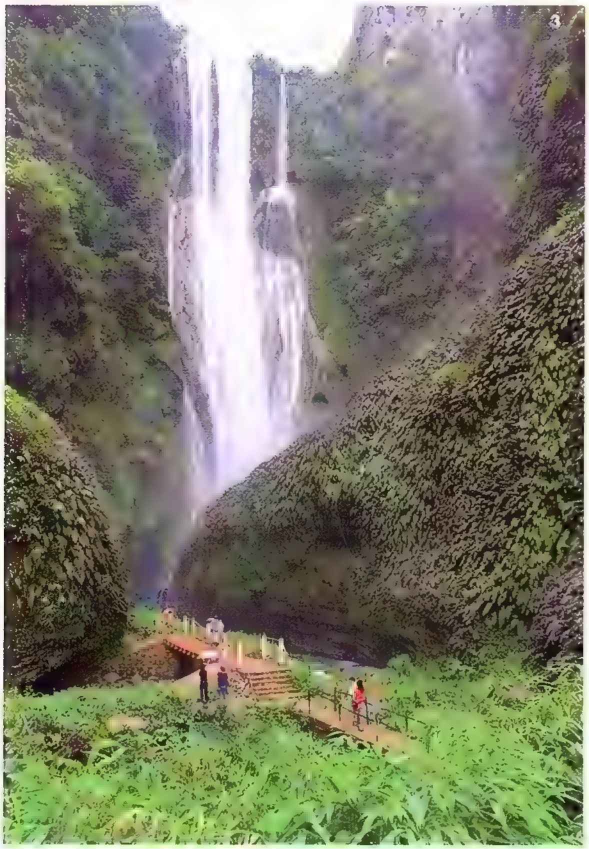
Our determination to see the waterfall was severely tested. The closer we walked toward the waterfall, the harder the rain poured down, endlessly, for two hours. Despite the weather there are many ways to experience the waterfall, you can walk, take the cable car or even ride a horse. I chose the simplest way, walking. As well as being the biggest waterfall in Asia, the Detain Waterfall is the second largest in the world, next to the America's Niagara Falls. I have also travelled to Niagara Falls and remember the huge mass of visitors. Standing on the Canadian side, I saw the visitors on the opposite American side waving flags. It was, for me, a very interesting feeling, so much activity around a natural site. However, whilst viewing the largest waterfall in Asia, I experienced a tranquil feeling. Connecting with Ban Gioc Waterfall in Vietnam, it is over 200 metres wide with a 70-metre fall and without the international tourist groups or national flags flying along the border. After visiting the waterfall on foot, I took a tour boat to see a completely different side of its stunning beauty. The water flows year round with June to September being high flow season and December to April low flow season with the water being clearest from September to November. The average annual flow is five times that of the Huangguoshu Waterfall in Guizhou Province.

1. The tranquil Mingshi Scenic Area lures travellers to live a secluded life here. (courtesy of the Detian Travel League)
2. The Black Water River derives its name from the reflection of the mountains along its course.
3. There is a small bridge under the waterfall at the Tongling Grand Canyon. It creates a special feeling to walk upon it.
4. Upon arrival at the Yiling Rock village, the warm Zhuang ethnic people will welcome you with their folk songs.
5. The karst limestone caves in the Yiling Rock area are not to be missed. (by Ma Yiu Chun)
6. Like to taste the Zhuang ethnic people's snacks?

Mingshi Scenic Area Scenery

I left Detian filled with excitement and continued my tour with a visit to the peaceful Black Water River. It derives its name because of the reflection of the mountains along its course which make it look black. Floating on the river and closing your eyes, you can't help drifting into a soothing, sweet dream in this tranquil setting.

We then headed toward the Mingshi Scenic Area, some 30 km from the Detian Waterfall. The typical karst land here presents another unique picture. Getting on the bamboo raft we passed by graceful, swelling peaks. Though the corn fields on both sides had been harvested recently and were no longer green, it didn't influence our high spirits because the constant rain had finally stopped and the skies were clear. Our guide told us that many Hong Kong TV dramas had been made here, I could see that the beautiful scenery required no editing or montage as it was so visually stimulating.



Magic Journey of Communing with Spirits

When the guide told us that the theme of our visit was the "Magic Journey of Communing with Spirits", everyone got excited and thought it had something to do with ghosts. But we soon found out that this was not the case. In fact, this scenic area is called Tongling (meaning Communing with Spirit). It may be because of its eerie flowing water as the Tongling Grand Canyon boasts a large single-level waterfall, falling 188 metres. It looks like it is dropping down from the sky. The water continues underground, forming the subterranean river. Thus, there seems to be a connection between the sky and the land, opening an invisible link between the two worlds. I don't know if it was because of the extremely fresh air or a newly found "invisible power" stimulated by the invisible world that kept us from feeling tired after we climbed the 817 steps to the top of the canyon. Visiting Detian Waterfall by boat was really nice, but walking on a bridge under the waterfall of the Tongling Grand Canyon holding an umbrella was an unforgettable experience.

Aside from its powerful waterfall, the Tongling Grand Canyon area also hosts a large amount of rare and ancient plants such as the Spindle Tree fern from the Jurassic Period and the uniquely shaped and uniquely named people-biting trees, eye trees and lip trees; their amazing appearance was quite amusing. The local stalactites, ancient cliff burial and natural caves make this area really one of a kind.

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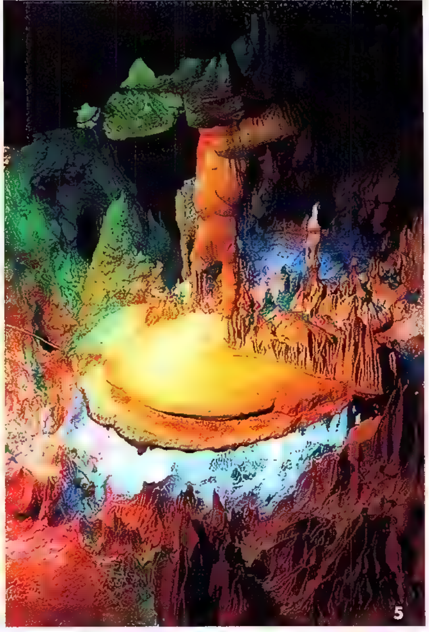

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Experiencing the Zhuang Ethnic Customs at Yiling Rock

Yiling Rock scenic area has typical karst caves which are naturally decorated by unique stalagmites and stele. It is a must see place and the local Zhuang ethnic group should not be missed.

You can experience genuine Zhuang ethnic customs at Yiling Rock Scenic Area. When visiting, prepare yourself for the loud trumpets welcoming you to the village and after the greeting, don't miss the opportunity to try the Zhuang home-made glutinous rice wine. And if you want to tip as a reward, remember that according to their custom, odd numbers are lucky numbers. If the locals put on a show for the visitors you can expect lots of activity. First you'll enjoy a bamboo dance with the Zhuang ethnic people, followed by traditional folk singing. You can also join in the fun and sing and your'e free to choose from pop songs if you like. The best singer will win a Zhuang ethnic girl's silk ball. Most worthy of mention are their traditional dances, they dress like wild people and dance enthusiastically, it's quite beautiful. In addition to the extraordinary sights in the village, you will also see a more common side of their life such as their tools, furniture and taverns. Last but not least, make sure you get a chance to try their delicious snacks, such as five-colour rice, glutinous cakes and mung bean cakes.

The Zhuang ethnic people's warmth left a long lasting impression on us, although we were only privileged to glimpse a small part of their life.

The four-day trip to Detian was over. I remember the first day I came to Nanning; the locals said that they felt sorry for me because I wasn't going to Guilin while I was in Guangxi. But actually, I was very happy because I was able to discover a less well known but equally spectacular part of this region. It also gives me an excellent excuse to visit Guangxi again!

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

Going to Detian Waterfall

Flight: CR Airways provides daily flights to Nanning, capital city of Guangxi. (www.crairways.com)

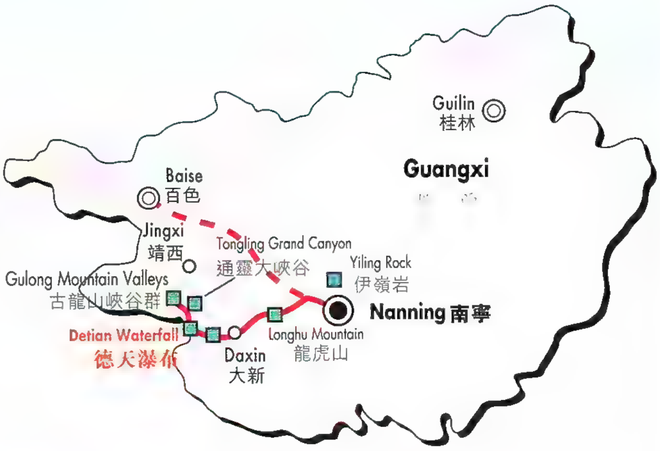
Best time to visit: August to November

Transport: There are special-route buses to the Detian Waterfall outside Yin He Hotel located on Chaoyang Road and at the Langdong Bus Terminus. All buses going to the Detian Waterfall will pass by Black Water River and Longhu (Dragon and Tiger) Mountain. The Nanning Passenger Transport Centre provides tour buses to Daxin County and Jingxi County, which also pass the Tongling Grand Canyon and the Gulong Mountain Valleys.

Admissions: Detian Waterfall: 80 yuan / Boat ride: 10 yuan / Mingshi Scenic Area: Free admission; bamboo raft: 20 yuan / Black Water River: Free admission; boat: 25 yuan / Tongling Grand Canyon: 60 yuan / Gulong Mountain Ecological Canyons: 138 yuan / Longhu Mountain Scenic Area: 30 yuan / Yiling Rock Scenic Area: 40 yuan

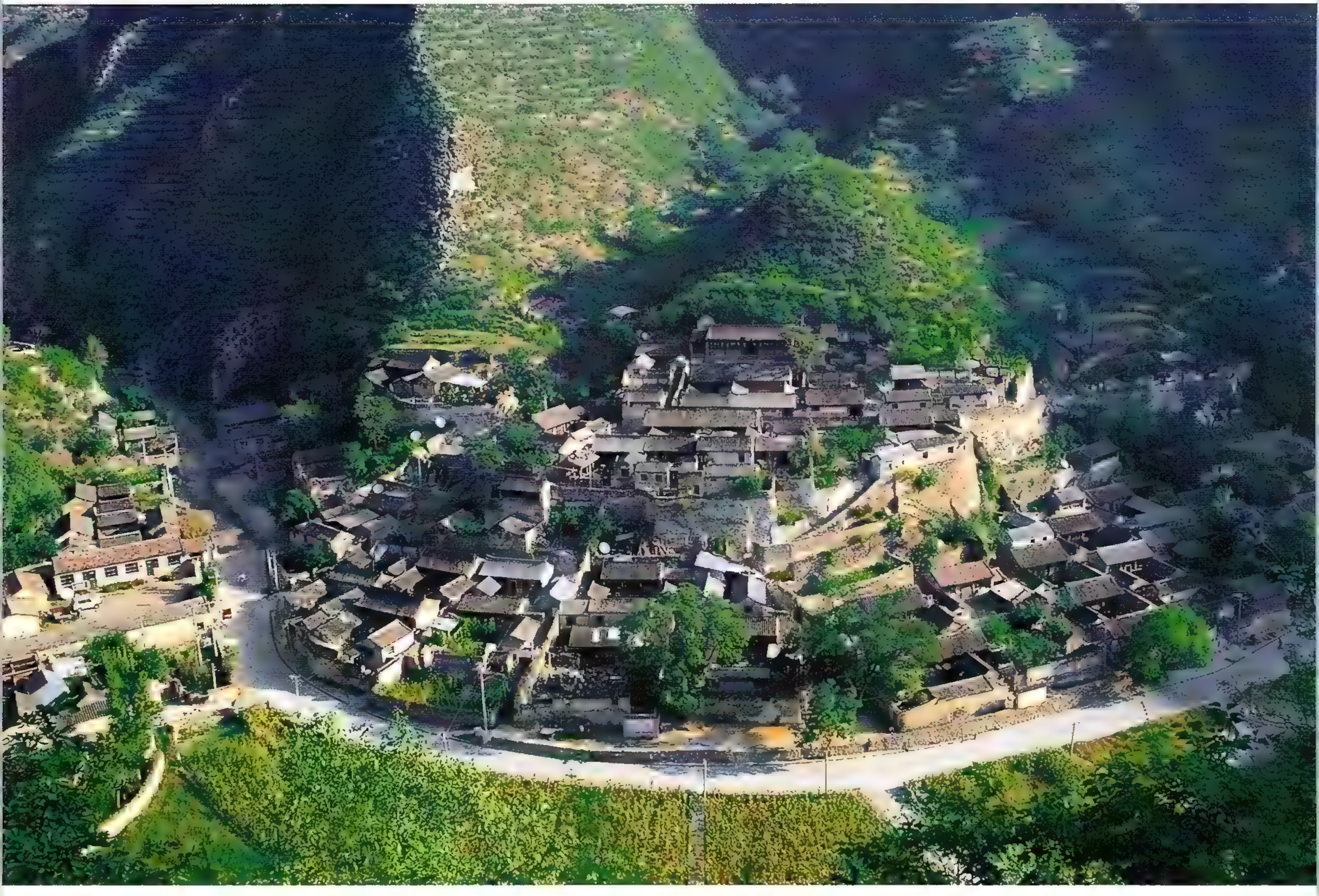
Other travel programmes: Rafting in Gulong Mountain, watching monkeys in Longhu Mountain.

Souvenirs: Kuding tea, wind-dried longan fruit; green bean pudding, perfume and cashew cakes (Vietnamese special produce)



CUANDIXIA VILLAGE
—BEIJING'S POTALA PALACE

Photos & Article • Xiaohong

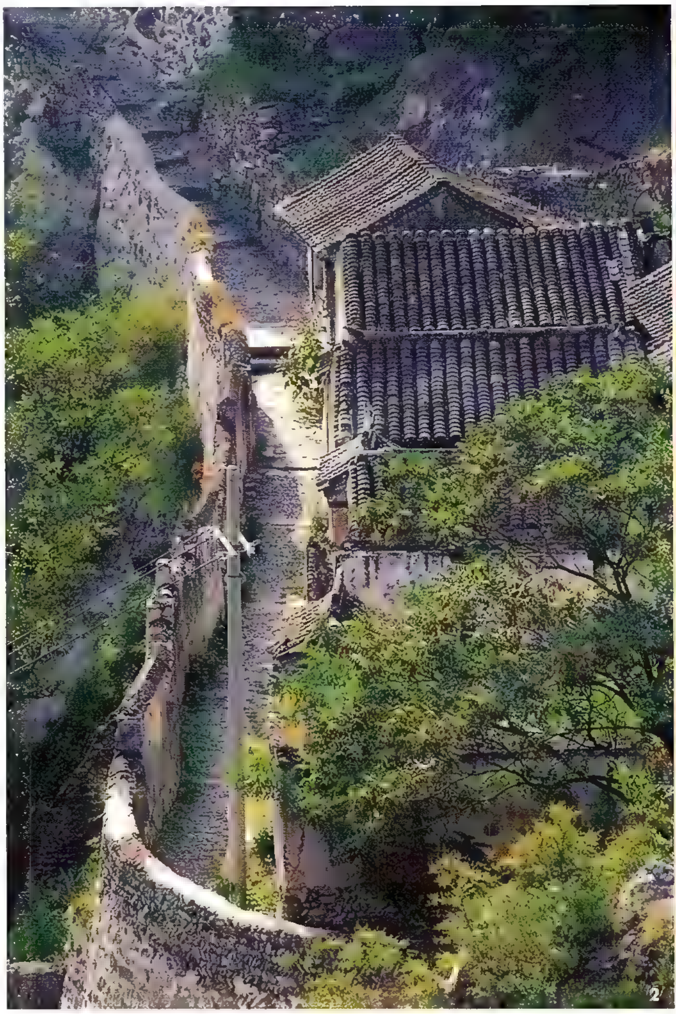


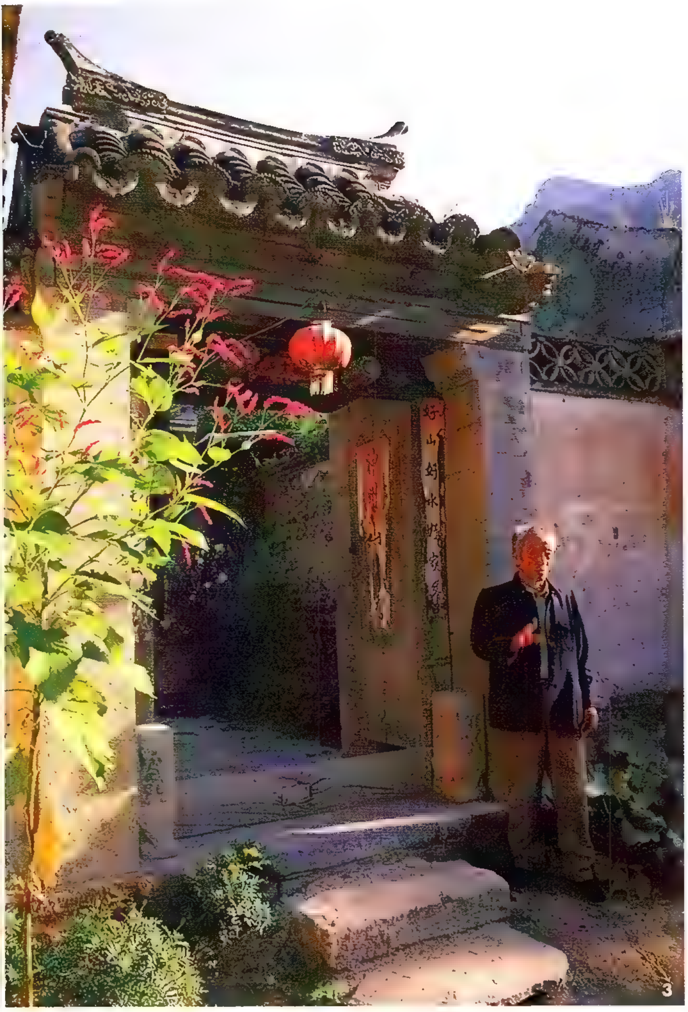
Cuandixia Village, an old fortress with a bizarre name, was a post house along an ancient road called Huangcaoliang in the west of Beijing, and somewhat resembles the Potala in Tibet. It has attracted many visitors to its humble streets, even some scene of the movie *Hero* directed by Zhang Yimou were shot here.

Looking up from a dictionary, the word "Cuan", (爨, pronounced as "Cuen" in Cantonese and "Cuan" in Mandarin) means an "earthen cooking stove".

Origin of the Village's Name

Cuandixia Village is situated in Zhaitang Town in the Mentougou District on the western outskirts of Beijing. It is said that at the head of the village there was a place where Lao Zi, the founder of the Taoism doctrine, used an earthen cooking stove to refine the pills of immortality. Since the village was located below the site, it was given the name Cuandixia (Below earthen cooking stove).





Cuandixia Village has a history of more than 400 years and has preserved some 70 residence compounds (totalling 500 rooms) of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Until recently, not many people knew of this place. Thanks to some enthusiastic painters and amateur photographers and movie directors who came here for their art, this village won fame.

One summer, I visited there by backpacking. On the way, the cab driver drove me to Han Mengliang's (the village head) house, which was a mini quadrangle with entrances on three sides. From its window one can view the whole village and to the southeast, an observation post on the mountain facing the village. Hanging on the walls inside the rooms, there are many stills of famous mainland stars. In the centre of the courtyard, there is a trellis under which clusters of red peppers and dried golden corn hang.

On a small dinner table under the trellis were home-made dishes like scrambled eggs with Chinese toon leaves, cold potherb dressed with sauce, pickled prickly ash, and so forth. All served with pancakes, noodles, porridge and ice-cold beer, it was truly an enticing meal! A couple who worked as news photographers were drinking beer and telling me, "We come here every summer to stay a few days, to enjoy the tranquillity and reminisce. And every time we stay with different family, so we can try different-flavoured home-cooked dishes."

Mr Han said, during the Yongle's reign of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Di, King of the Yan State, instituted a migration policy to solve the population decrease in the north caused by years of war and natural disasters. This is when the ancestors of Cuandixia Village emigrated from Shanxi Province. Mr Han is 15th generation (roughly 300 years) Cuandixia villager.

Ancient Stone Fortress

Seen from a river valley, Cuandixia Village appears like a fortress, a little bit similar to the Potala Palace in Tibet. The stone walls are nearly 20 metres tall. A winding purple-blue flagstone alley separates the village into upper and lower parts. Situated behind the village is the Old Dragon-head Hill. The structure of the village is unique: apart from stone-made quadrangles, there are also paths allocated for people, cats, dogs and water. The most

1. Overlooking the fan-shaped Cuandixia Village located in the western outskirts of Beijing.

2. Beside the stone wall of the village there is a path for military use in the past that leads to the observation post outside the village.

3. An old villager recounts the splendour of his quadrangle and the function of each chamber.

representative buildings of the village — combining brick, stone or wood carving — were built in an order from east to west.

The design of Cuandixia Village is both effective to prevent flood and deter bandits. The village is only eight kilometres from a pass to Tianjin city, which is only a 20-minute horse ride. The village was often attacked by Mongolian cavalrymen in the Ming Dynasty and by bandits in the Qing Dynasty. In order to deter invaders, Cuandixia Village was rebuilt with defensive walls into a stone fortress. The walls have steps and hidden paths and the village has observation posts, which all help to make it easy to guard but hard to invade.

The village is no longer bustling with people. In the 1990s, the people who left for work in other places increased dramatically. Now there are only some ten households with less than 50 villagers. It has no city-like noises, hotels, bars, restaurants or night clubs. It only has several hundred tile-roof rooms, an ancient stone grinder and the only public stone toilet left from the Ming and Qing dynasties, which stands right in the middle of the village. It seems to signify to people the feeling that "We are all one family." The whole village is permeated with the ancient atmosphere.

That evening, Mr Han's wife came back from picking herbs on the mountain. They used the herbs, along with cucumber, Chinese cabbage, eggs and pickled prickly ash leaves to make a table full of food, served with beer. The supper was fantastic. After the meal, Mr Han took us out for a walk in the village. The cool wind, the starry sky, the chirping crickets and croaking frogs reminded me of my simple childhood.

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

1. In the morning, an aged villager leans against the stone wall carved with the Chinese character "Cuan" to enjoy the sunshine.

2. Looking out from the brick window frame of a remaining fortress wall, one can see the Old Dragon-head Hill outside the village.

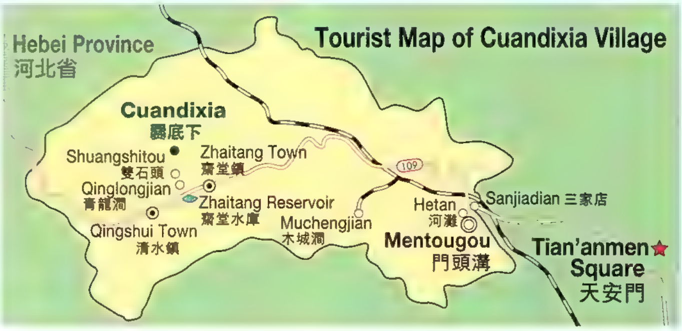
Travel Tips

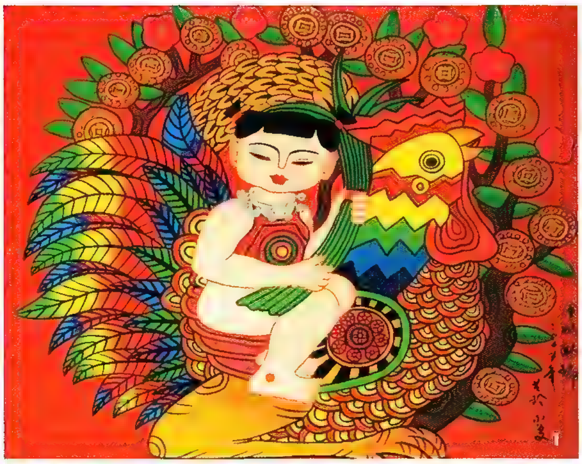
Transportation: Take the Beijing subway and get off at terminal station Pingguoyuan (Apple Garden), then take bus No. 929 to Zhaitang Town stop. Distance: about 30 km; fare: 10 yuan. Then take a cab (10 yuan) to Cuandixia Village, which requires about 30 minutes.

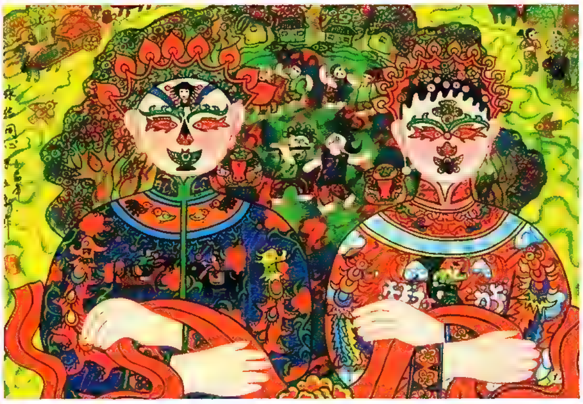
To reach the village by driving a car, start from the Pingguoyuan subway station, and follow this route: head west to the 109 National Highway, passing through Sanjiadian, Zhaitang, Cuandixia intersection, Qinglongjian, Shuangshitou and finally to Cuandixia Village.

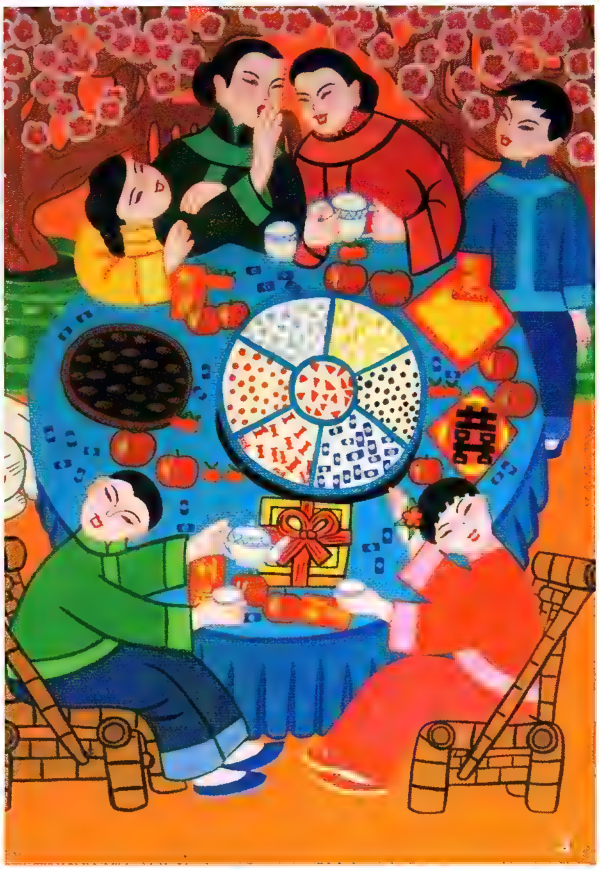
Accommodation:

1. Admission: 20 yuan per person. There is parking area inside the village.
2. There are about 20 households in the village that can receive guests. There are rooms with 2-to-5-person kang (brick beds) or beds. Prices range from 15 to 20 yuan per day. It is recommended that people from South China try the northern-style kang to experience the local customs.
3. Every household can provide you family dishes, which costs about 20 yuan per meal.









FARMERS' DRAWINGS IN LONGMEN

Photos & Article • Walia

One day when I strolled in Longmen County in Guangdong Province, I found a gallery decorated as the courtyard of a farmer's house. It actually sells the famous farmers' drawings in Longmen.

Ideas from Daily Life

Longmen is one of the three major hometowns for farmer's drawings in China. All these drawings reflect the farming village life and rural customs. The technique of water-colour and colour ink are being adopted. Besides, it has absorbed the features of embroidery, wood carving, and paper-cutting, as well as characteristics of the indigenous Lantian Yao minority. Since the drawings are mostly drawn by artists living in farming villages, the subjects of the drawings are always cows, horses, chickens, fishes, and vegetables.

Rise and Fall of Farmers' Drawings

The creator of farmers' drawings was Mr Tan Chifa. Though having only received five years' education in primary school, he was fond of drawing at childhood. With years' persistence, he was finally selected by the Longmen County Culture Museum in 1964. Later, he became a professional painter. He and his friends first created promotional new year pictures, which gradually developed as the special farmers' drawings.

In 1978, the Longmen farmers' drawings began to be known in China. In a jointly held exhibition of farmers' drawings in Guangzhou, capital city of Guangdong Province, westerners were surprised and attracted by this special type of drawing. At that time, a piece of farmers' drawing was sold at 100 yuan. The drawings were once rushed to purchase by Japan, Sweden, Norway, and United States. This has inspired the establishment of many public drawing groups in Longmen County. In 1988, Longmen was named as "Hometown of Modern Folk Drawings in China" by the country's Ministry of Culture.

Twenty years afterwards, sad to know, the Longmen drawings are still sold at a retail price of 100 yuan per piece! Since many farmer painters are hard to make a living with such low income, they turned to draw popular objects such as unicorns, lions, dragons, or write lucky couplets, etc. We should treasure and respect this singular form of art, before it is lost in the wheel of time one day.

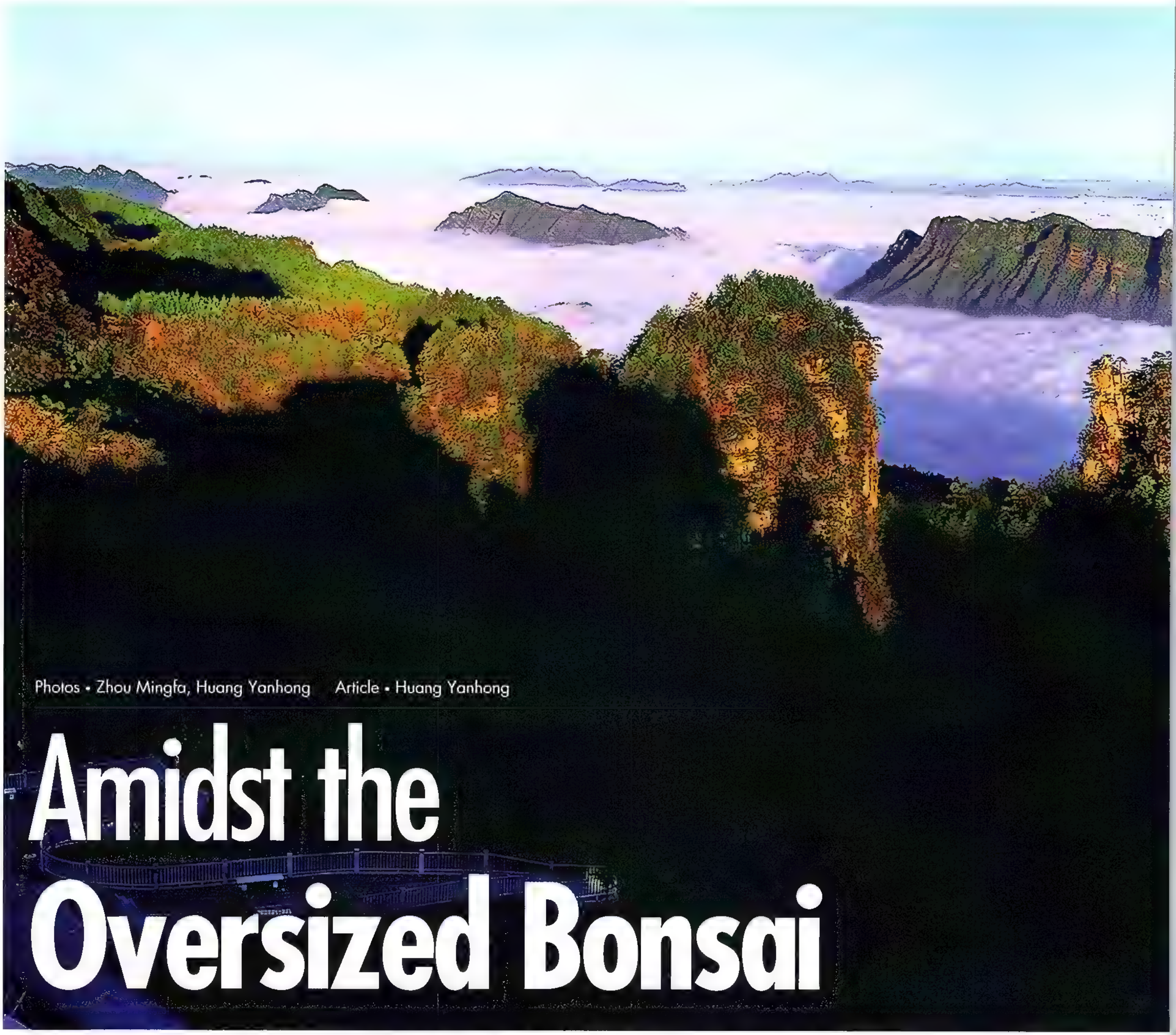
1, 2. Interesting ideas of farmers' drawings come from the most ordinary life.

3. A drawing themed on marriage matching at a farmer's house.

Legendary
Zhangjiajie

Zhangjiajie in northwest Hunan Province is blessed with amazing scenery. The area's more than 3,000 jagged mountains, deep, serene forests, and clear springs and streams create the effect of entering an oversized bonsai planting or a Chinese scroll painting.

The landscapes of Zhangjiajie Chinese resembles an oversized bonsai. (by Zhou Mingfa)



Photos • Zhou Mingfa, Huang Yanhong   Article • Huang Yanhong

Amidst the Oversized Bonsai

A UNESCO "World Natural Heritage" site, Zhangjiajie's Wulingyuan Scenic Area abounds with unusual karst peaks of unparalleled beauty, particularly after a rain when they are wreathed by clouds. The region draws all sorts of visitors, from keen photography buffs to weary urbanites seeking solace and a life dedicated to Buddhism to tourists who simply come to appreciate its otherworldly beauty.

As soon as we arrived a local man in his 40s came up to us and started chatting. He seemed sincere and introduced himself as Zhang. He showed us his guide license, for which, he explained, he had paid 3,000 yuan to take the required test. He said other local "guides" were not licensed because they did not want to pay the fee. We agreed to hire him for 30 yuan each day. He also carried our camera bags, a tough job as there were four of us and we were often going off in separate directions, so that he had to repeat the same information several times.

Iron Man of the Mountains

We set off along Jinbianxi (Golden Whip Stream), often passing elderly women acting as guides. They moved surprisingly quickly, even toting their clients' bags on their shoulders. Equally white-haired sedan carriers raced happily along the mountain path. It took us more than two hours to reach Shuiran Simen (水繞四門, "water running around four gates"), from where we took the free environmentally friendly bus to the Bailong (Hundred Dragons) Elevator. The giant outdoor elevator is like an iron man, his upper body flanking the higher slope and his

legs hidden in the mountains below. After that we climbed back on the bus again and headed to the Yuanjiajie Scenic Area.

The magnificent No. 1 Bridge under Heaven, the pride of Yuanjiajie, is 300 metres high. A small kiosk sits at the bridge entrance, draped with chains of "lucky" padlocks which couplets or words resembling luck were carved on. We then came to Mihuntai (Soul-depriving Terrace), which didn't sound all that auspicious, so we hurried on to the Back Garden where dozens of delicate peaks came into view. From there we went back down the mountain on foot, saving the cost of taking the cable car. The mountain path was a little slippery in the drizzle, though, and the mosquitoes were terrible.

No Trip Complete without Huangshizhai

Immediately upon entering Zhangjiajie, we noticed this sign: "You waste a trip to Zhangjiajie if you don't go to Huangshizhai." But we were told that the cable car to Huangshizhai (Yellow Stone Stockade) was under repair. The long climb up the steep mountain requires a great deal of courage. On the north side of Huangshizhai is Wulongzhai (Black Dragon Stockade) in the Yangjiajie Scenic Area. Legend says that several generals from a family surnamed Yang once stationed troops there during the Northern Song Dynasty (960 — 1127). The Yang descendants remained in the area, giving the place its name, Yangjiajie (Territory of the Yang Family). Some place names in Yangjiajie commemorate the famous heroes of the Yang family. Wulongzhai has one of the more colourful histories; by the end of the Qing Dynasty and during the early days of the Kuomintang government, it was occupied by bandits and traces of their legacy can still be seen. The local people we met warned us that it was a dangerous trek and they were right — the 300-square-metre village was

1. A sea of clouds overlooked from the peak. (by Zhou Mingfa)

2. A winter scene at Zhangjiajie. (by Zhou Mingfa)

山神赐福万事
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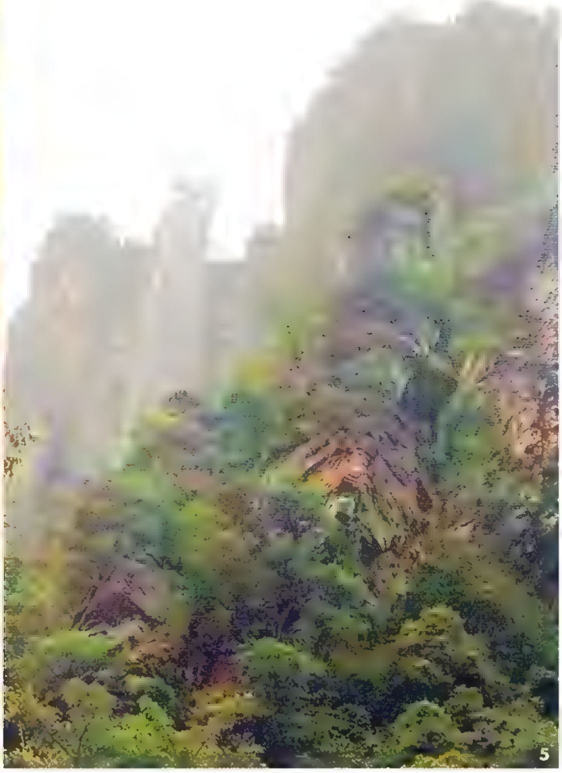

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1. Peaks enveloped in waves of clouds. (by Zhou Mingfa)

2. Chains of "lucky" padlocks are hanged in the small kiosk built at the entrance of the No. 1 Bridge under Heaven. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. Within a few minutes, tourists are being brought by the Bailong (Hundred Dragons) Elevator from the foot to 300 metres up of the mountain. (by Huang Yanhong)

4. Money Road is the most famous trail along the Golden Whip Stream. (by Huang Yanhong)

5. The appearance of the Bailong Elevator. (by Huang Yanhong)

surrounded by steep cliffs and accessible only by a narrow 1,000-metre-long path. We had to pass through caves and climb between the cliffs to reach the top where there was a ladder set at a 90° angle against the cliff face.

After that we rushed on to Mount Tianzi (The Emperor). As we were taking pictures along the way there, we saw a peak suddenly appear from behind the clouds, towering into the sky. The driver called it the General's Rock; it disappeared again after 10 minutes. Mount Tianzi is named for Xiangwang Tianzi, a head of the Tujia ethnic group, and a heroic revolt that took place here. He Long (1896 — 1969), one of the 10 great marshals of China, was a native of Zhangjiajie. We saw the bronze statue of him, which has become a symbol of the scenic area.

Revitalising Mist

At Mount Tianzi we met Zhou Mingfa, a local photographer who lives alternately on and off the mountain. He came to Zhangjiajie in 1995 and told us he enjoyed living here, as it gave him the chance to visit the many sights at leisure and even analyze the terrain when he has time. When the clouds and mists descend, he rushes to the mountain on his motorcycle. He once spent several hours on the viewing terrace at Yunqingyan waiting for the clouds to appear so he could take photos. He and his wife took along a bottle of Shaoxing millet wine to keep them warm. Just as they finished the bottle, waves of clouds enveloped the scene. Zhou remarked that the mountains were like bones and the clouds and mists were flesh; without that flesh, he felt the mountains lost some of their vitality.

Best Views by Foot

We stumbled upon Daguangtai (Grand View Terrace) by accident on the way back from Mount Tianzi. We noticed a side road while driving west, so we got out of the car and took a walk. After about a kilometre, a sea of cloud suddenly appeared before us. We could just make out the shapes of the mountain ranges wrapped in the misty fog. Later we stopped for a rural-style meal with a local family. The patriarch, Mr Chen, who was about 60, told us they used to run a small hostel at the foot of the mountain but had been moved here as part of the beautification of the scenic area. Since Daguantai was not included on regular tour routes, only a small number of tourists ever found them. Other shops had closed, and his is now the only one left. His son runs a hotel in a village a few kilometres away.

After lunch we went to Shili Hualang (Five-Kilometre Gallery). We boarded the small tourist train and listened to the commentary over the loudspeaker. Visitors craned their heads out the windows to see the different sights being described: "God of Longevity Welcoming Visitors", "Old Man Picking Herbs", and "Fairies Paying Respects to the Goddess of Mercy", etc.

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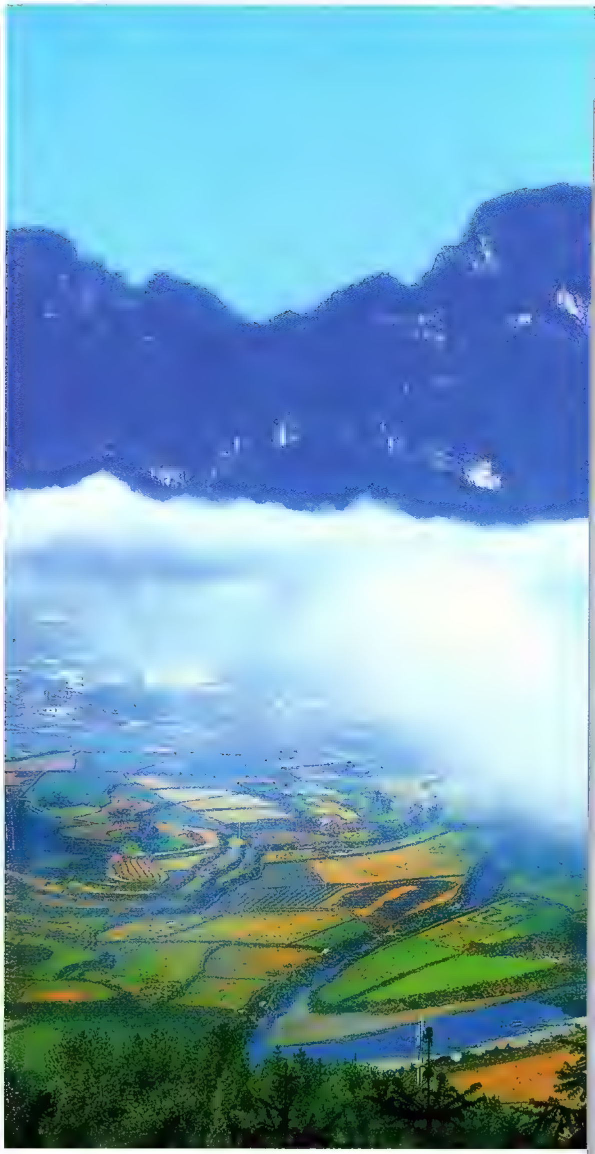


Since I'm no good at figuring out which peaks match which descriptions, I didn't bother looking. Then I decided to walk back instead of returning on the train. There was a path along the railway a little wider than the path at Golden Whip Stream that allowed you to enjoy the tall, vertical outcrops and other interesting peaks at your own pace. With enough time to really look, I could suddenly make sense of the names, especially with Double-faced God Peak, an isolated peak with a nose and a pair of eyes on both sides. And at that size, it really is god-like. We had also been told that four or five groups of monkeys inhabited the Monkey Slope when we passed by, meaning two to three hundred monkeys live there.

Mount Tianmen — Where Singer Ni Na Became a Nun

We rode to the top of Mount Tianmen along the Tianmenshan cableway, the longest cableway of its kind in the world.

The travel agency told us that we might not see much if it rained heavily, but we might be lucky enough to at least see Tianmen (Gate of Heaven) in the mist, a rare sight. So I kept trying to envision what it might look like. Tianmen Mountain is eight kilometres south of Zhangjiajie City and its main peak rises 1,518.6 metres above sea level, making it the highest peak in the area.

When we reached the cable car terminal, my first thought was to look for some vestige of Li Na's pilgrimage here. The former singer came here to become a nun. A place near the forest was pointed out to us and we were told that Li Na had once lived in seclusion in a small house there. But she had long since left and the little house had collapsed. We were reassured it would be rebuilt.

I went over anyway to stand in the midst of the heavy clouds and dense forest. Nine years after recording the moving song "The Tibetan Plateau", she

1. Taking a mountain train to tour the Five-Kilometre Gallery is interesting. (by Huang Yanhong)

2. The path of 99 turns winds up to the Tianmen Mountain. (by Huang Yanhong)

3. The main peak of Tianmen Mountain rises 1,518.6 metres above sea level, with the Tianmen (Gate of Heaven) Cave on its right side. (by Zhou Mingfa)

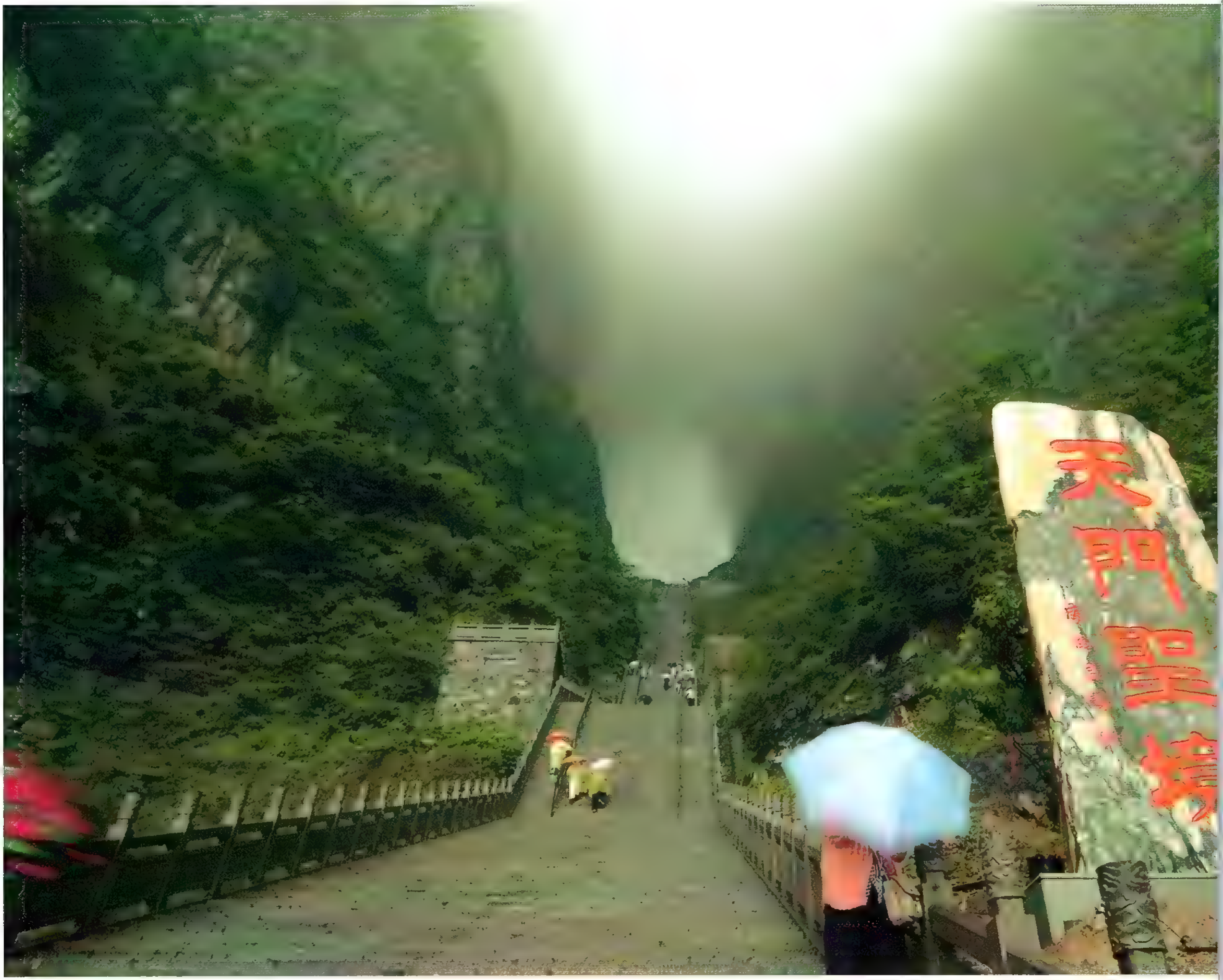
4. Photographic works of Zhou Mingfa have become the most local-flavour souvenirs of Zhangjiajie. (by Huang Yanhong)

quietly arrived at Tianmen Mountain. She bought some firecrackers, incense and candles and kneeled before Tianmen for a long time. Some 3,000 local villagers turned out to greet her when they found out she was there. She was so moved that she immediately sang "Going into Tibet".

She stayed for several days, eventually deciding to become a nun on Tianmen Mountain. She had the small wooden house built and planted a vegetable garden. Soon after taking the Buddhist monastic name of Shichangsheng, she went to Mount Wutai in Shanxi Province to learn the Buddhist scriptures. After that she wandered from place to place and finally went to the United States.

Gate of Heaven Spitting Fog

We returned again by cable car and changed to a minibus halfway down, then headed straight to Tianmen Cave. As soon as we arrived we were amazed by the scene before us. High above us, the



large cave (about 130 metres high) was "spitting" heavy fog. The top of the cave and the mountains around it were covered in fog. We were so excited that we climbed as quickly as possible. After scaling all 999 steps we were worn out and drenched; our umbrella was broken.

There was a wonderful atmosphere inside the cave with all the clouds and mist floating overhead, sometimes heavy, sometimes ethereally thin. A column of water that looked just like a plum blossom hanging down poured from the notch at the top of the cave, hence it is known as "plum blossom rain". It is said that the column of water becomes larger and the water turns red when there is severe drought. When the water turns black, it is said something momentous is about to happen. The local people claim to have seen a black "plum blossom rain" in 1949 (when the People's Republic of China was established) and again in 1976 (when Chairman Mao Zedong died).

I was amazed to think that an airplane had actually flown through the cave in 1999. There were plans to repeat the flight in 2006 by some Russian pilots but a poll on the Internet revealed that 80 percent of the population did not support it, calling it a stunt that might harm the environment.

There are several other caves on the mountain as well, including Qiu'er (Begging for a Child) Cave. It is believed that a woman who is struggling to become pregnant can improve her chances by going to the cave to pray for a child. She is supposed to kneel down in earnest and then throw stones into the cave, keeping count of the noises they make as they fall. If it is an odd number, she will give birth to a boy, but if it's even, she'll have a daughter.

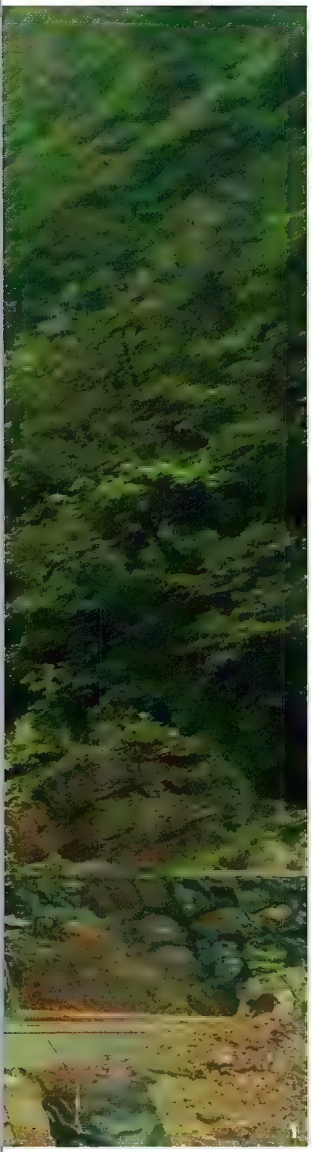
The walk back down along the mountain path was really spectacular. The path turns 99 times. Viewed from above it looks like a giant coiled snake, a truly wondrous sight in this land of so many fascinating wonders.

Translated by Wang Zengfen

1. A treasured scene of heavy mist at the mountain's entrance. (by Huang Yanhong)

2. Water adds more beauty to the streams in Zhangjiajie. (by Zhou Mingfa)

3. This was where Li Na, former female singer of the song "The Tibetan Plateau", had once lived in seclusion in a small house. (by Huang Yanhong)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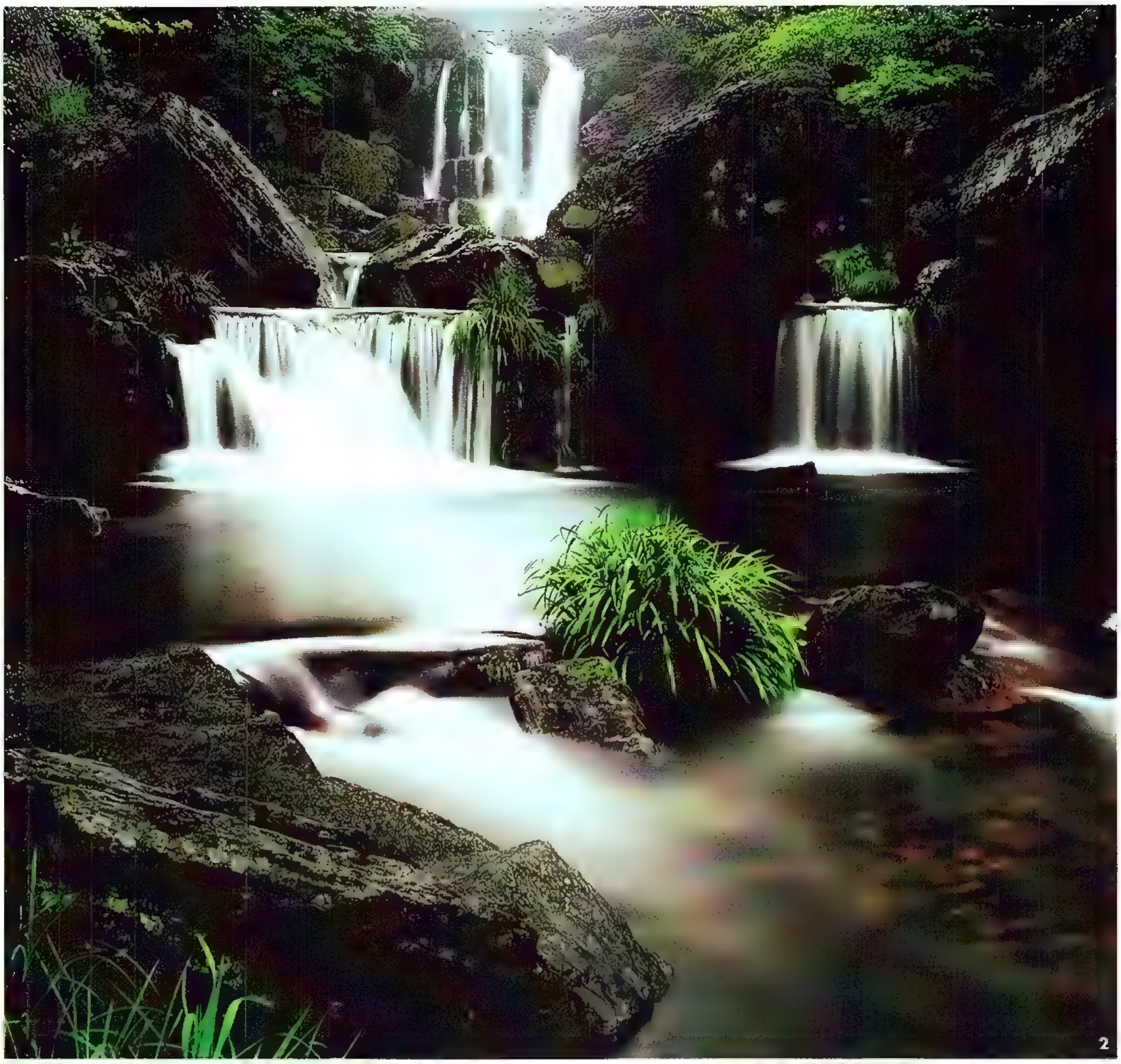
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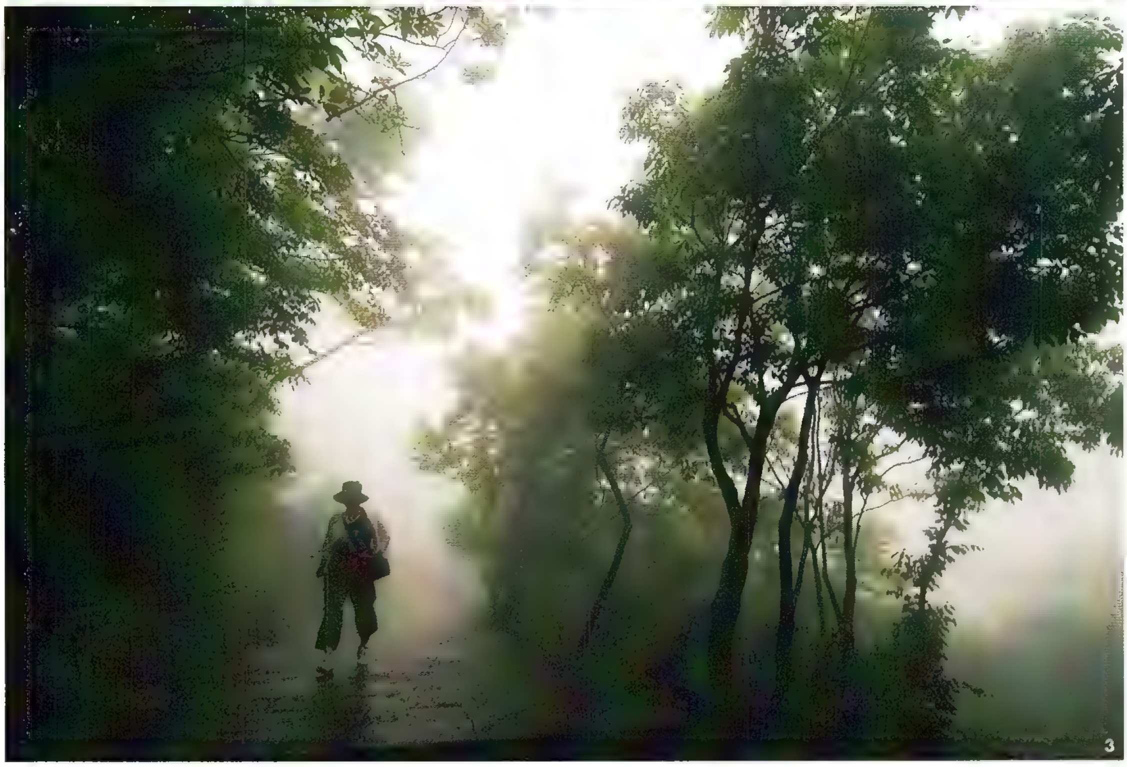
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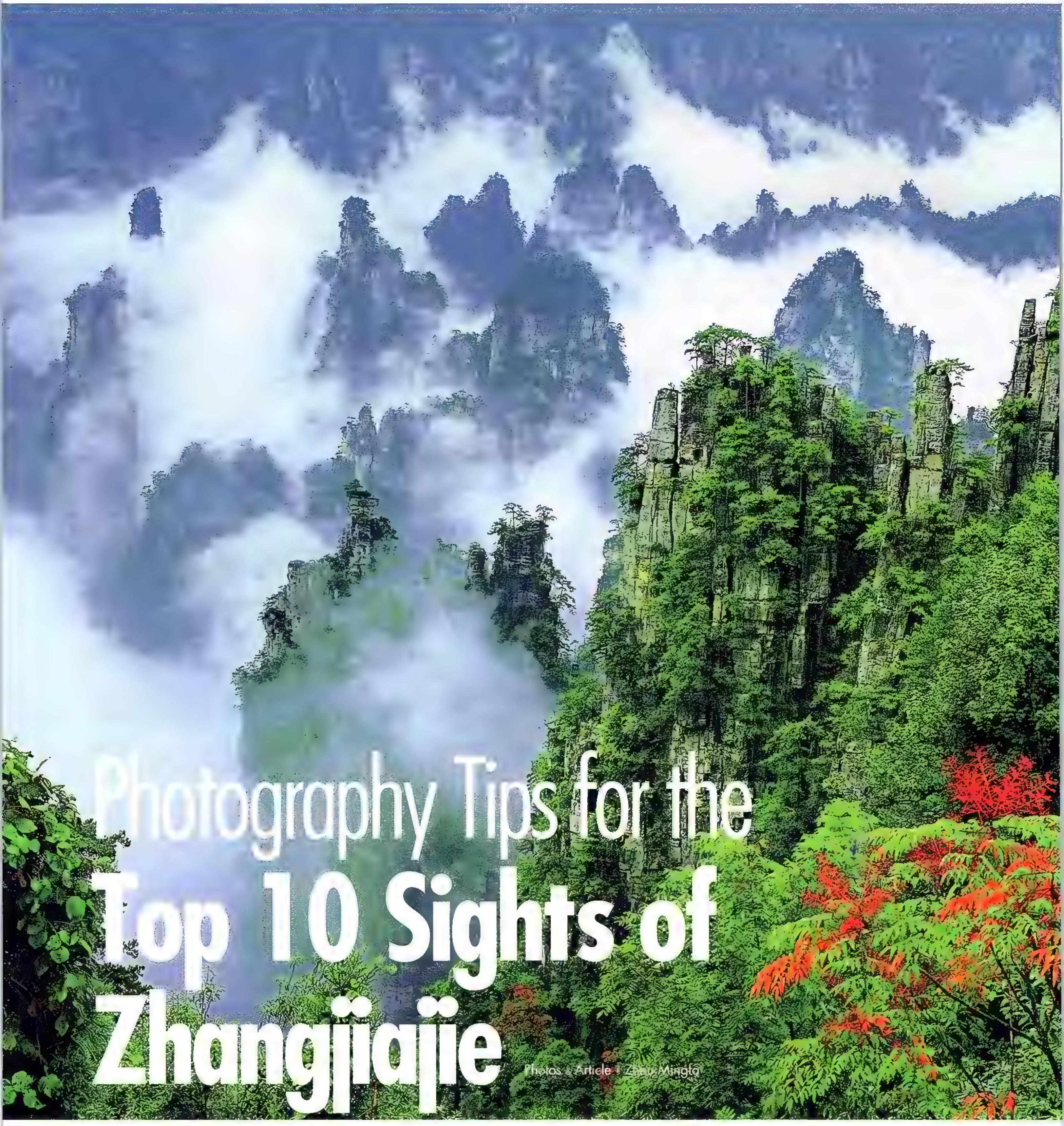


Photography Tips for the Top 10 Sights of Zhangjiajie

Photos & Article | Zhou Mingfa

Zhangjiajie is best known for the Yellow Mountain range, but the area's many scenic spots are scattered and their names can often confuse tourists. Below are some useful tips on transportation, the best sites to visit and the best times to photograph Zhangjiajie's 10 top scenic spots.

Yubifeng in Autumn

Yubifeng (Imperial Brush Peak) in the Tianzishan Scenic Area is representative of the 3,000 oddly shaped quartzite peaks of Wulingyuan.

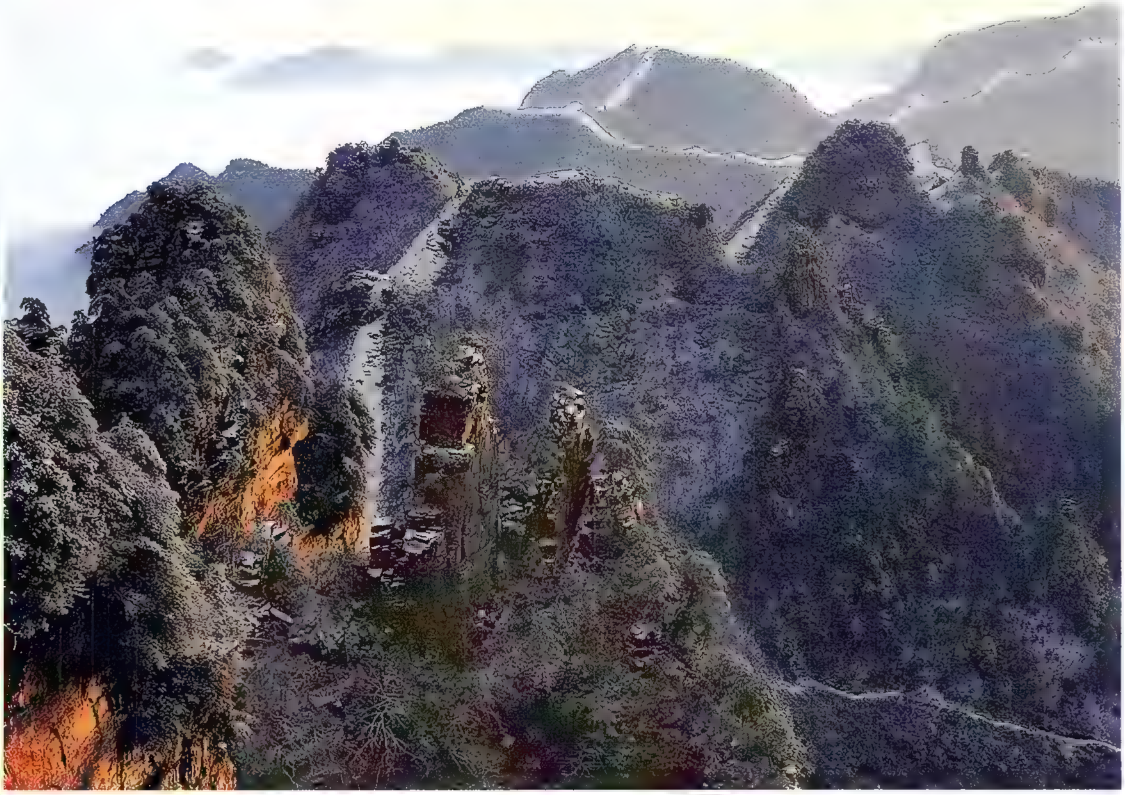
Transportation After flying or taking the train to Zhangjiajie, take the regular bus from the urban area to Wulingyuan. Go to the ticket office from where you can catch the free bus to the Tianzishan cable car station. You can ride the cable car, travel by car or walk. The distance is about one kilometre.

Photography Beautiful photos can be taken in any season. In spring, the peaks are wreathed in fog, while in summer the stone forests glisten after showers. Autumn brings stunning red maples and winter delivers sparkling snow scenes and ethereal mists.

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (80 mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/15 second

Best seasons Any time of year is suitable, but the best months are January, April, June, August and October.

Reminder Avoid planning a photography trip during the May Day and National Day holidays because the place will be packed with tourists.



Snow-covered Tianzishan Mountains

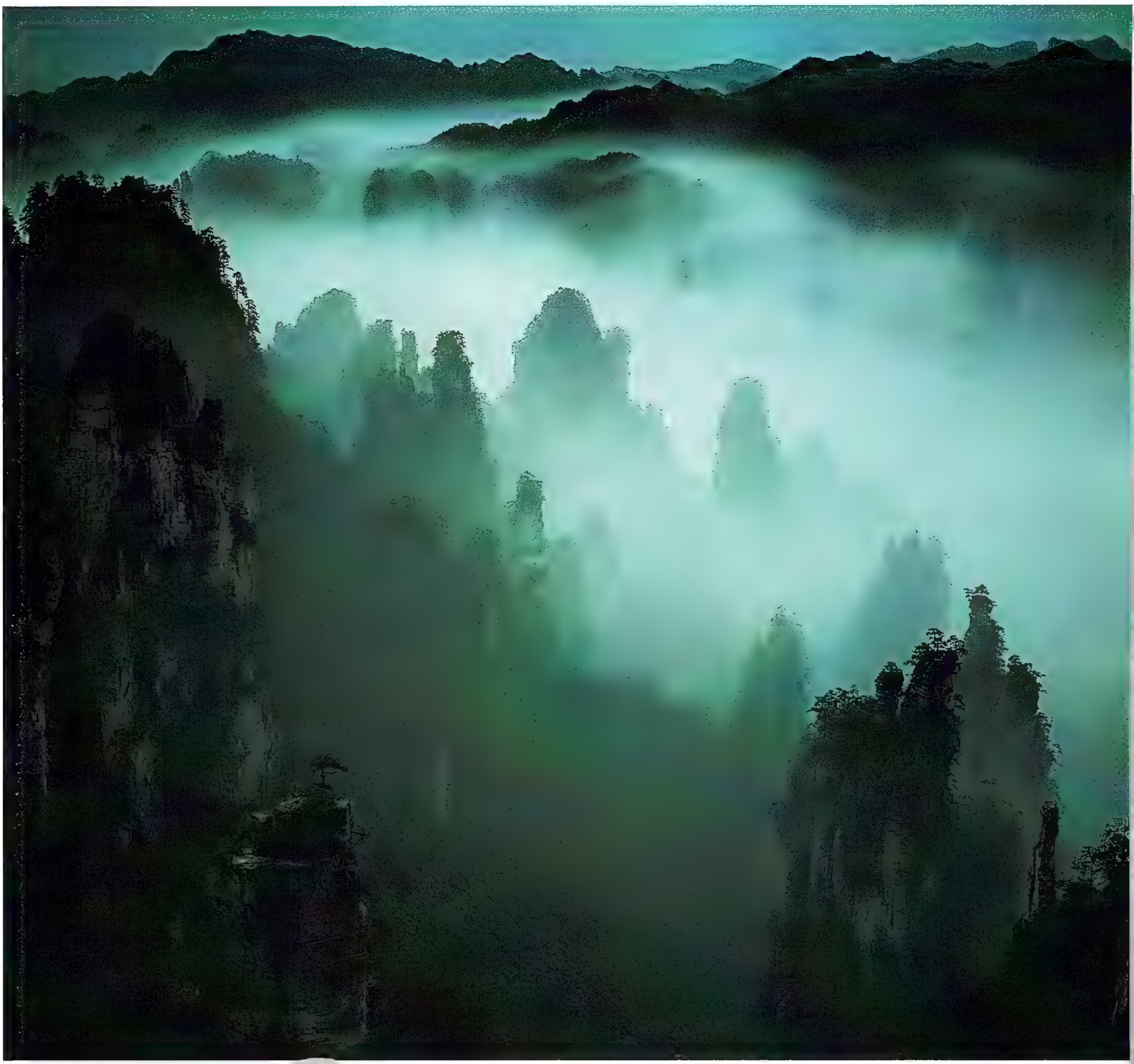
On snowy days, the view towards Huanghe (Yellow River) Village from the observation terrace on Tianzishan Mountain reveals the firebreak winding around the mountain like a silvery snake. This is the best place to take pictures drenched in glowing sun or low-lying fog. It is also ideal for photographing the sunrise. Spectacular cloud formations are on show here for more than 100 days throughout the year.

Transportation Stay at hotels within the Tianzishan scenic area if you want to be able to take early morning photos as the observation terrace is only a 20-minute walk away. From here you can take the free bus to He Long Park to take pictures of the Xihai Stone Forest.

Photography Try to reach the Tianzishan cable car station before dawn for photos of the sunrise and early morning mists. Locals can be hired to help carry photographic equipment, but be sure to make an appointment in advance (20 yuan per person).

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (50 mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/15 second

Reminder The Tianzishan Mountains reach elevations of more than 1,340 metres and the snows begin to fall every December, so be sure to wear non-skid shoes and other protective gear appropriate for winter hiking.



Night at Yunqingyan

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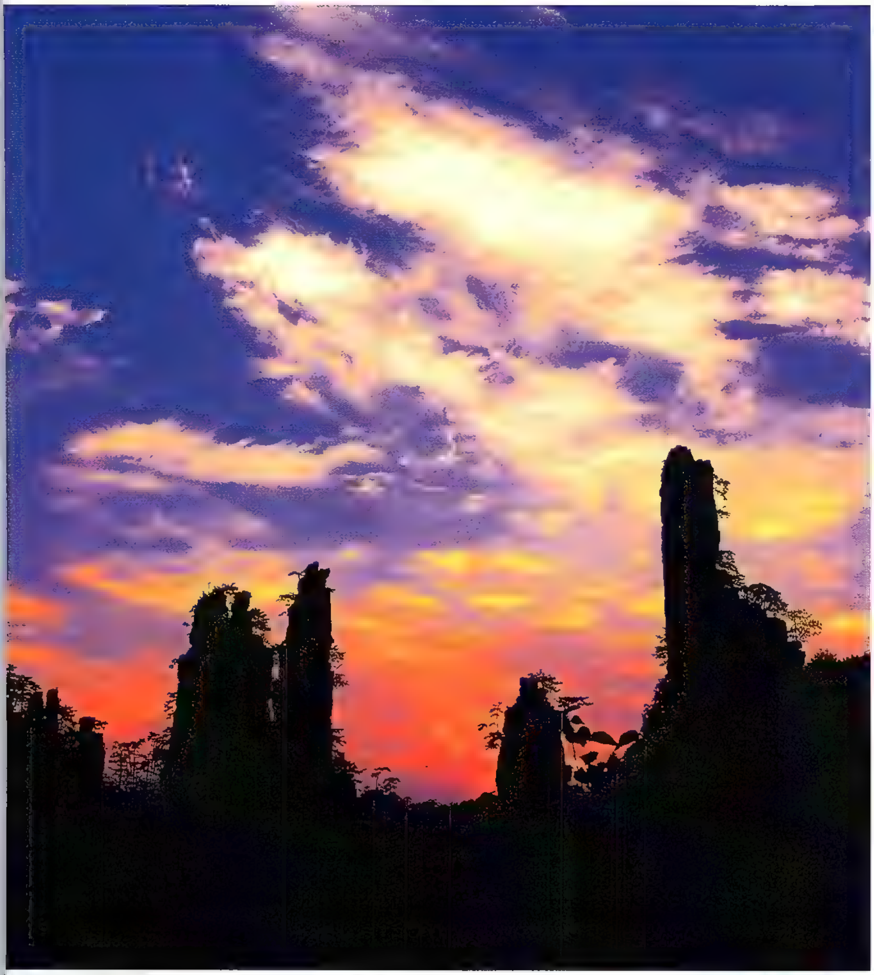
Yunqingyan is in Helong Park, the key scenic spot of the Tianzishan Mountains. The queerly shaped peaks rising high from the deep valley take on a dreamlike quality, especially when surrounded by mists and clouds after rain.

Accommodation There are so many scenic spots in the Tianzishan Mountain area that it's best to visit during favourable weather conditions to get the best pictures. This charming area is also a summer resort with easy access to board and lodging. Three hotels, situated three li from the scenic spots, are run by locals at a cost of about 60 yuan per person for a standard room. Be sure to book ahead during the busy seasons.

Photography A rainstorm just before dark will ensure the clearest night photos. The best nights tend to be around the lunar 15th of each month when the moonlight is clear and bright. Long exposure times are needed; pay attention to the dew. The observation terrace at Helong Park is an ideal place from which to take pictures. Remember to bring along a flashlight.

Camera Hasselblad 501cm (50mm lens); aperture: 8; speed: 35 minutes

Best seasons From August to October and from the lunar 13th to 17th of each month.



Evening at Yubifeng

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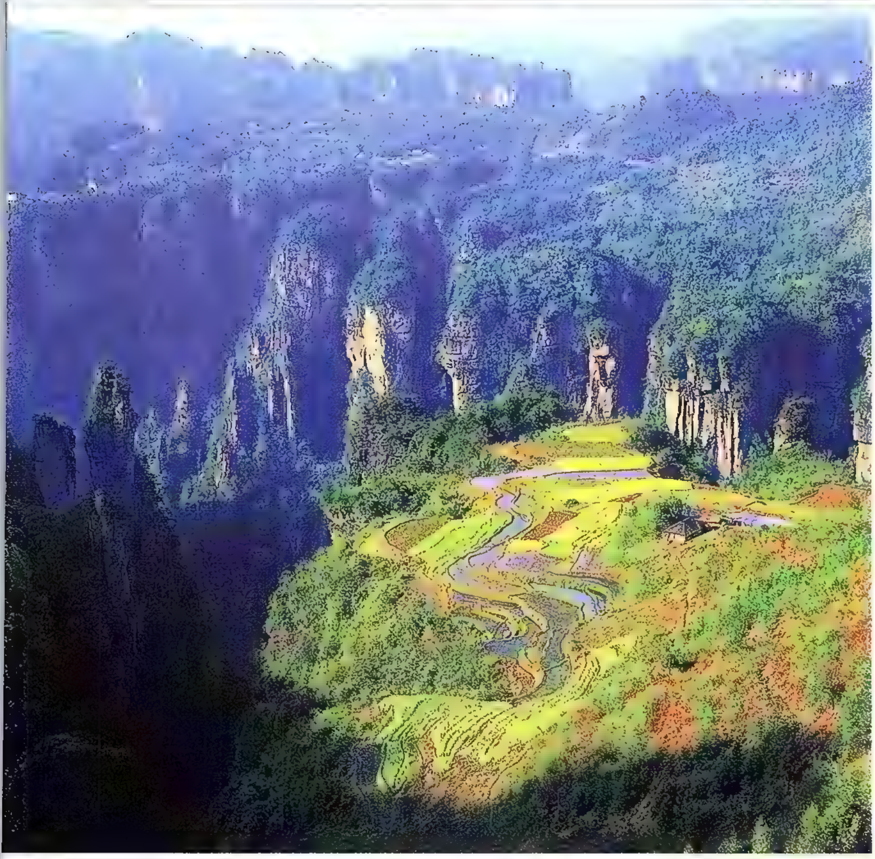
The peak is named for its shape, which resembles a brush. The peaks in this area are said to have been brushes once used by Xiangwang, a local hero. Walk from the observation terrace deep into the gorge where you can take silhouette shots of Yubifeng and beautiful photos of the sunset. This is the best vantage point from which to take pictures and not many people know about it.

Photography Check the sky at about 6pm to see if the sunset looks promising then make the 10-minute walk down into the gorge.

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (80 mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/8 second

Best seasons July and August.

Reminder Bring along a flashlight because by 7:40 when the last light of the sunset fades you will need to find your way out again.



Beautiful Highland Fields

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The rice fields high in the hills near Laowuchang in the Tianzishan Mountains are surrounded by water on three sides and cover several dozen mu. Brilliantly green in spring and summer, the fields ripen golden in autumn. In winter the area is covered by an expanse of golden rape flowers.

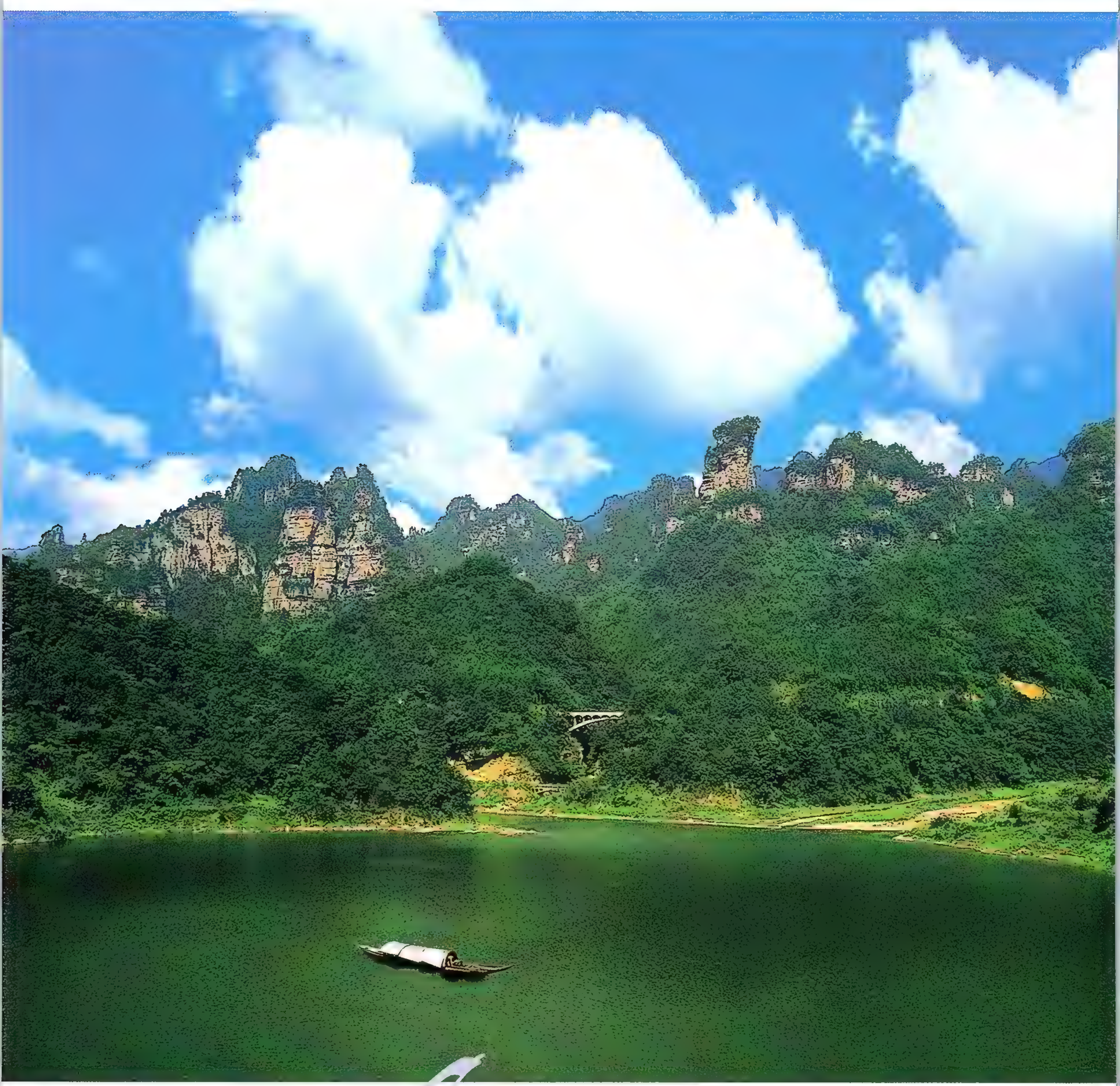
Transportation Take the free bus to the junction of the Dingxiangyong Village road, then walk for about 40 minutes along the country road or hire a motorcycle for 10 yuan per person.

Photography The sun rises over the rice fields at about 7am in spring. Sometimes there is sidelight effect at this hour, so try to arrive earlier and wait for a good opportunity to take side-lit pictures.

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (80 mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/30 second

Best seasons April and May.

Reminder Farming is dwindling as more locals turn to tourism to earn a living, so there are fewer and fewer rice fields to photograph. But when the rape flowers are in full bloom it is still very beautiful.



Wuling's Heavenly Pond

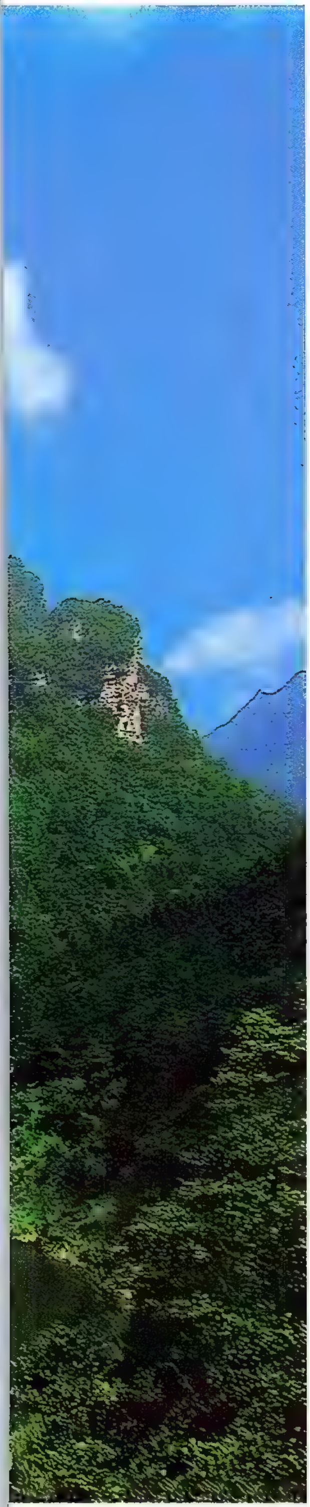
The deep jade Wuling Heavenly Pond is in Wulingyuan.

Transportation Take the free bus, but stop midway (after about 10 minutes) to take pictures then re-board the bus to reach the next scenic spot.

Photography The best pictures are taken here on clear days of blue skies, fluffy white clouds and no wind, conditions which provide a clear view of the mountain.

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (50 mm lens); aperture: 22; speed: 1/15 second

Best seasons June and July.



Huangshizhai in Mist

At an elevation of 1,200 metres and covering an area of 250 *mu*, Huangshizhai (Yellow Stone Stokade) has more than 20 scenic spots and the largest observation terrace in Zhangjiajie Forest Park. There is a saying that a trip to Zhangjiajie is in vain without a stop at Huangshizhai.

Transportation A 200-metre walk from the entrance of Zhangjiajie Forest Park will bring you to the free bus to the Huangshizhai cable car station. A round trip ticket is 86 yuan per person. A variety of scenic spots may be photographed from the top of the mountain. The beacon tower is the best place from which to take pictures.

Photography Attractive scenes all along the mountain path provide a wealth of landscape photo opportunities.

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (50 mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/30 second

Best seasons Great photos can be taken in all season, particularly just after a rain when the sky clears. The winter snow scenes are especially lovely.

Reminder Since there is no hotel at the top of Huangshizhai, you will have to camp if you want to take pictures of the sunrise. Be sure to pack a tent and bring enough food and drink along.

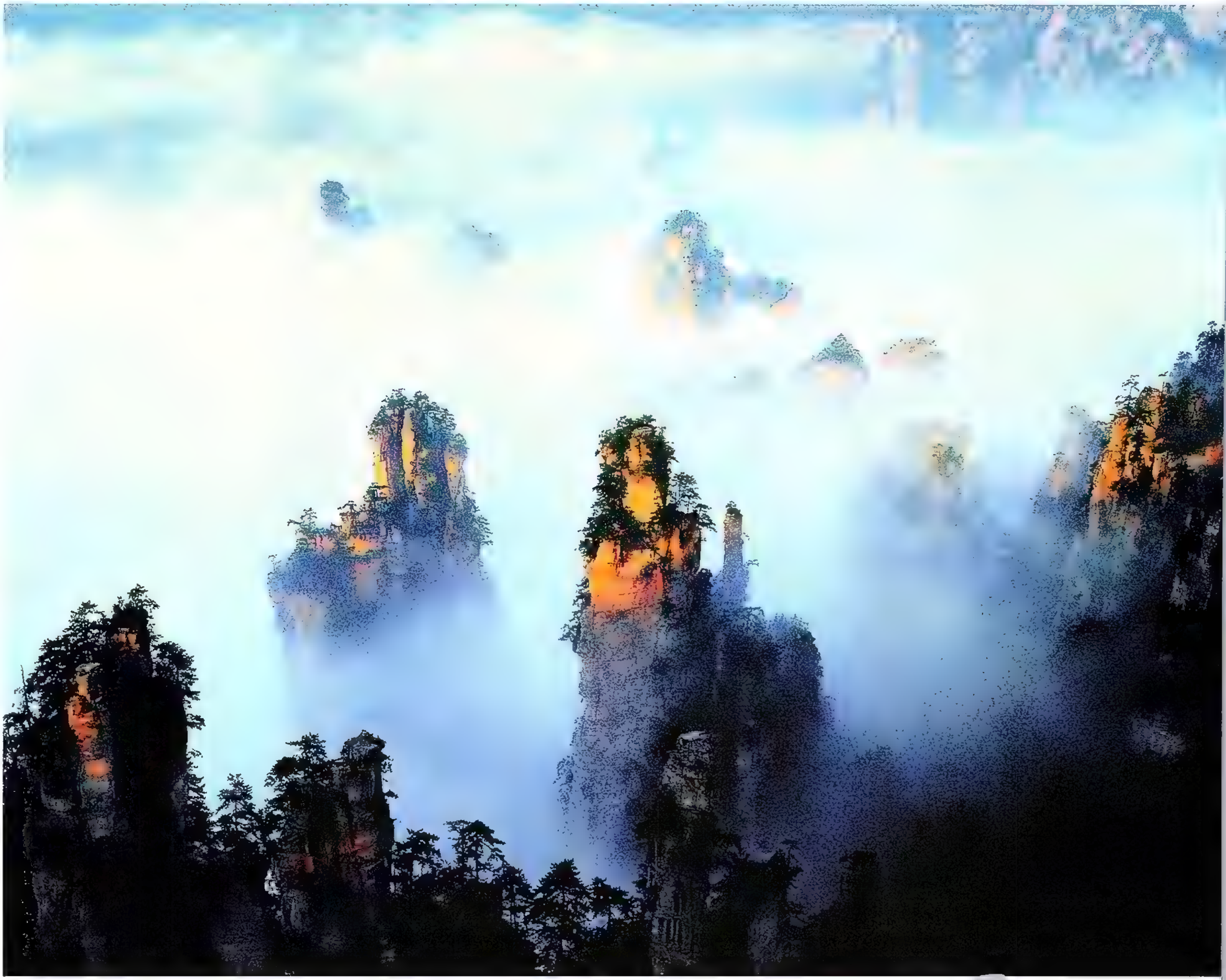
Baofeng Lake & Waterfall

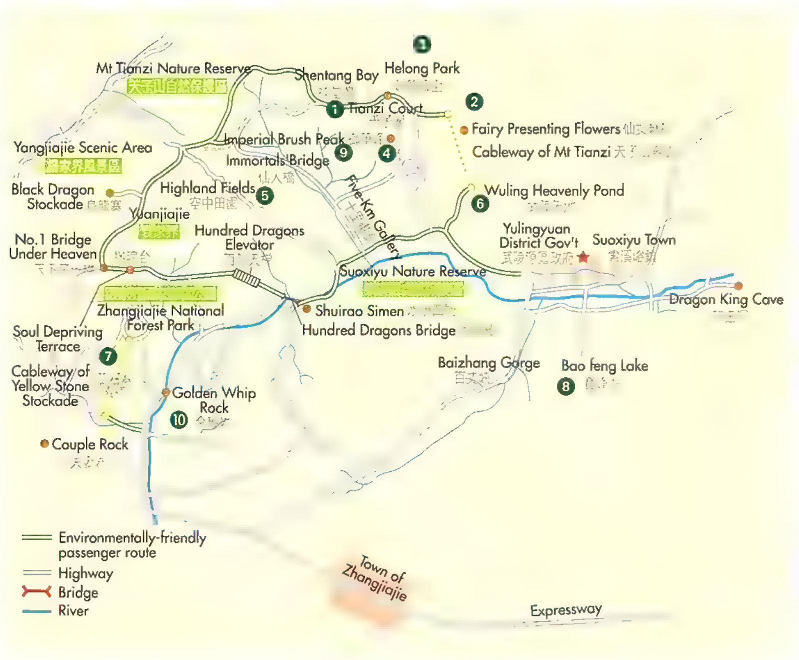
Baofeng Lake, just 2 kilometres from the district government offices of Wulingyuan, is 2.5 kilometres long and 72 metres deep. One of the most famous scenic spots in Wulingyuan, it is representative of an area acclaimed for its picturesque lakes and unique, unruly beauty. Two emerald islets grace the lake, which is encircled by more characteristic lone towering peaks. Take a boat out onto the lake to take photographs of the surrounding scenery reflected in the water.

Transportation Hire a taxi from Wulingyuan to reach Baofeng Lake.

Photography The "flying" waterfall is visible as soon as you enter the Baofeng Lake area. The best time to take pictures of the waterfall is around 9am.

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (80 mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/15 second




Mt Tianzi Nature Reserve
天子山自然保護区
Shentang Bay
Helong Park
3
1 Tianzi Court
2
Fairy Presenting Flowers
Cableway of Mt Tianzi
Yangjiajie Scenic Area
Imperial Brush Peak
Immortals Bridge
仙人橋
9
4
Black Dragon Stockade
Highland Fields
空中田園
5
Yuanjiajie
Five-Km Gallery
Wuling Heavenly Pond
6
No.1 Bridge Under Heaven
Hundred Dragons Elevator
Yulingyuan District Gov't
Suoxiyu Town
Suoxiyu Nature Reserve
Dragon King Cave
Zhangjiajie National Forest Park
Shuirao Simen
Hundred Dragons Bridge
Soul Depriving Terrace
7
Cableway of Yellow Stone Stockade
Golden Whip Rock
10
Baizhang Gorge
Bao feng Lake
8
Couple Rock
Environmentally-friendly passenger route
Highway
Bridge
River
Town of Zhangjiajie
Expressway

Xihai Stone Forest

9

Located in northwest Wulingyuan, Xihai Stone Forest is a bucket-shaped valley encircled by green mountains with some 1,000 peaks densely packing a canyon of only a few kilometres. This exquisite natural wonder is more imposing when filled with fog.

Transportation Walk for about 100 metres from He Long Park in the Tianzishan Mountains and head down to the observation terrace in Yunqingyan.

Photography Yunqingyan, the Tianzi Pavilion and the Warrior Taming Horse are the best places for pictures. Particularly stunning photos can be taken just after a rain.

Camera Hasselblad 501 cm (140 ~ 280 mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/15second

Best seasons Conditions are favourable all year round, but the sky clears nicely after a rain.

Reminder Arrange for guides or bag carriers ahead of time. The fog tends to last for about one hour after a rain.

Walk along Jinbianxi

10

Jinbianxi (Golden Whip Stream) is more than 20 km long and is named for nearby Jinbian Rock. The stream flows from a deep, secluded valley filled with thousands of peaks that reach up to the clouds and dense forest on either side. It is the longest tree-lined mountain path in the world.

Transportation Walk to Jinbian Stream from the Shuirao Simen scenic area or enter from the Forest Park and walk along Jinbianxi to Shuirao Simen.

Photography The best opportunities for photos are after a rain, which leaves behind mists, or in sunlight during the spring and summer.

Camera Hasselblad 501cm (140 ~ 280mm lens); aperture: 16; speed: 1/15 second

Best seasons Spring and summer.

Reminder Jinbian Stream is 7.5 km long. Hire bag carriers at the entrance because once you start walking you will rarely encounter anyone willing to tote your equipment along the trail.

Photos & Article • Huang Yanhong

Discovering Xiangxi

Hunan Province is also known as "Xiang" (湘). In the west it borders the provinces of Hubei, Guizhou and the Chongqing Municipality, which accounts for its status as an important regional trading hub. Located where the northeast tip of the Yunnan-Guizhou highlands meet the mountains of western Hubei, home of the Tujia, Miao, and other ethnic minorities along with the dominant Han, the area is a fascinating melting pot of diverse languages, lifestyles and folk customs. Within these scenic hills and lakes are ancient villages with captivating charms all their own.

Yongshun

The Legend of Corpse-driving

I was both horrified by and morbidly curious about the "corpse-driving" ceremonies I'd heard about in Xiangxi. After touring Zhangjiajie we headed for Yongshun, where the custom is said to be practised.

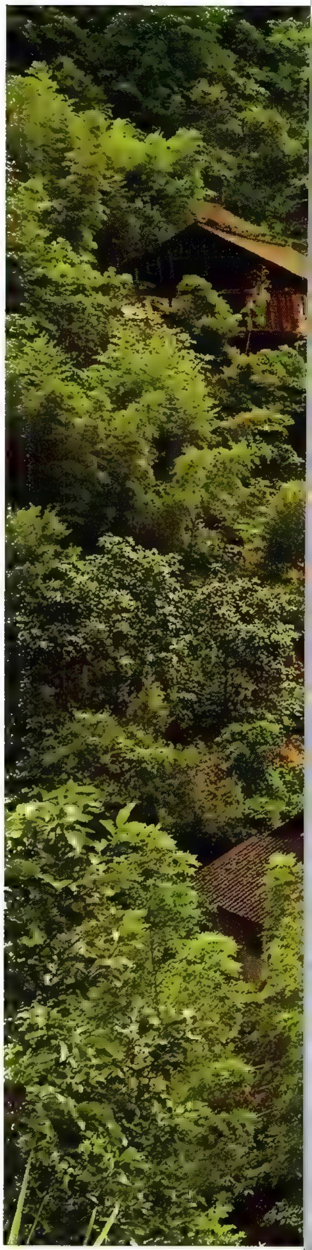
A corpse-driving ceremony, as bizarre as it sounds, is just that: a dead body, under the command of a "corpse-driver", can be made to stand up, walk, turn, etc. If there are several corpses, they can even be made to walk in line. On a dark and windy night, the corpse-driver follows the dead bodies on their brisk walk, clanging a small gong to warn villagers to "lock up your dogs and keep away!" The very thought of it seemed like something out of an old horror movie and sent a shiver right down my spine.

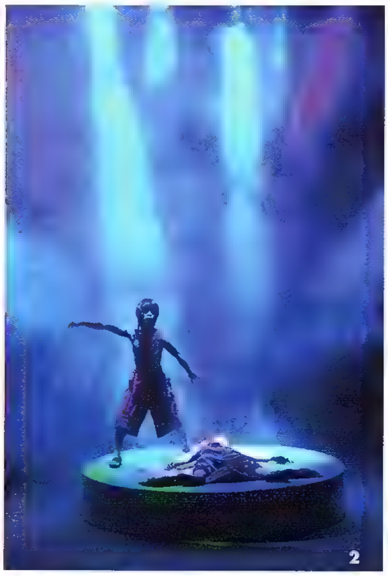
We went to see some Tujia ethnic minority performances and met Huang, the director of the show. He hails from Yongshun, where there's a large Tujia population. He answered my questions about corpse-driving, saying it always takes place at night. The corpse-drivers shout, "The animals are coming!" whenever they see people ahead. When I asked whether this was impolite, he said it was simply part of the custom.

Huang's show includes a demonstration of corpse-driving, but the re-enactment is less poignant and macabre than the real thing. The show simply depicts warriors who sacrificed their lives in the war against foreign invaders being sent home to Xiangxi by the necromancer.

I wanted to see an actual corpse-driving procession, but Huang said that even he had never seen one. Now that transport is so convenient, the practice may soon be obsolete.

The earliest Tujia community settled down in Lao Sicheng. It took us an hour to drive the rocky 20-km road from town. The village has been proclaimed a "National Protected Heritage Site", but no admission fee is charged, a rarity in China.





1. Visiting local market - daily routine of the villagers.

2. The re-enactment of corpse-driving on stage is less poignant and macabre than the real thing.

3. A secluded village in Xiangxi.

Where Urbanites Retire

The Peng ancestral hall in the middle of Lao Sicheng houses wooden statues of previous generations of Tusi. Another two kilometres along the ancient path is the Masters Palace, a rather distinctive Tu-style building. We heard from the villagers that the library used to house a precious volume of the Diamond sutra that reportedly could dispel natural disasters. When a devastating drought in the early 20th century called for desperate measures, the Diamond sutra was brought over from Lao Sicheng and Lin, the only scholar who could read it, chanted from the sutra. It worked like a charm and rain fell within a few days.

Now Xiang Shengmin, a man in his 60s, has the lonely job of guarding the Masters Palace. The job pays 200 yuan per month, income that he supplements by growing his own vegetables to make a basic living. But the loneliness has obviously taken its toll on him. We could tell he was thrilled to see us, but he said little and only answered when spoken to. He said he had spent the past 18 years here. It was hard to imagine how one person could endure such long periods of time in a dank and gloomy temple with no electricity.

We followed the path along the river and soon arrived beneath a cliff where there used to be ancient paths up the cliff face. Now we could only see a row of holes, with some ancient carvings on the stone wall. A new bamboo building stood across the river. The owner, Zhang, is a retiree who has given up the city life for pastoral pleasures. He lives a blissful existence of planting vegetables, rowing a boat and enjoying his green surroundings and the clean air. He said he was planning to accommodate tourists in the future.

1
贈送
黄金美
芙蓉鎮汪氏姜

1. Streets in Wangcun are crammed with hotels, restaurants, and shops-all the amenities associated with busy city life.

2. The copper pole that commemorates the history of Emperor Chu signing a peace accord with the headman of Xizhou in the year 940.

3. The owner of the shop selling "Liu Xiaoqing Rice Tofu" covers the sign touting the actress' name to prevent curious tourists from taking pictures.

4. A clear creek gurgles soothingly in the tranquil village of Dehang.

Wangcun

The Real Hibiscus Town

In real life, Hibiscus Town is Wangcun. It's an old town in Xiangxi's Yongshun County, in north Youshui, which used to be the capital of the Tu kings and was called Youyang in the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC—25). Then it and Lao Sicheng were renamed Xizhou during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907—965) period. In the early 1980s, the renowned Chinese director Xie Jin made the film Hibiscus Town here, starring popular actors Liu Xiaoqing and Jiang Wen, making the ancient town famous across China and beyond.

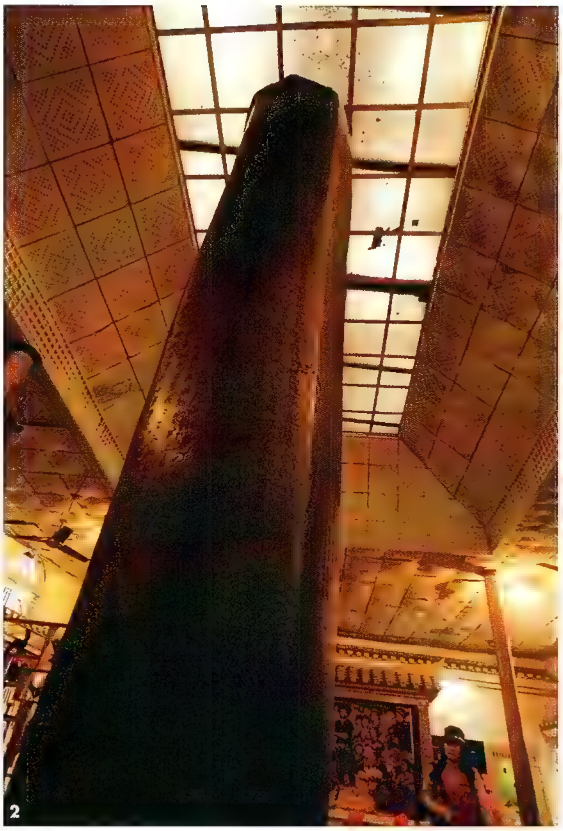
Now this Tu town is dedicated more to commerce than normal small town life. The streets are crammed with hotels, restaurants, shops, and even beauty parlours — all the amenities associated with busy city life. Every nook and cranny has been stuffed with local specialities, crafts and souvenirs for sale. Clearly tourism has become the town's main earner. Thankfully, some of its ancient charms still remain on the old street, where a sign touting "Liu Xiaoqing Rice Tofu (Liu Xiaoqing is a famous actress in the mainland) " beckons tourists eager for a taste. But don't worry if there are queues; this is by no means the only rice tofu vendor along the street.

I left the hustle and bustle of Wangcun and went to a one-storey house not far away on the southeast side of town to see a copper pole that dates from the ancient Xizhou. In the year 940, after a war between Emperor Chu of Changsha and headman of Xizhou, a peace accord was signed. The copper pole commemorates this history. Previously it had stood in Huixi Ping, but was later relocated to Wangcun when the river was flooded to build the Fengtan power station. Because the house where the pole is displayed was so poorly lit, I could hardly make out any of the small characters inscribed on it.

Guzhang

Maze-like Red Stone Forest

We headed south after leaving Wangcun and soon entered Duanlong Xiang in Guzhang County. We followed the signs to the Red Stone Forest. Interestingly, this 30-sq km Red Stone Forest is actually the world's only such formation of carbonate stones that emerged in the Cambrian age around 400 ~ 500 million years ago. The stones are said to change colour according to the weather, time and seasonal changes.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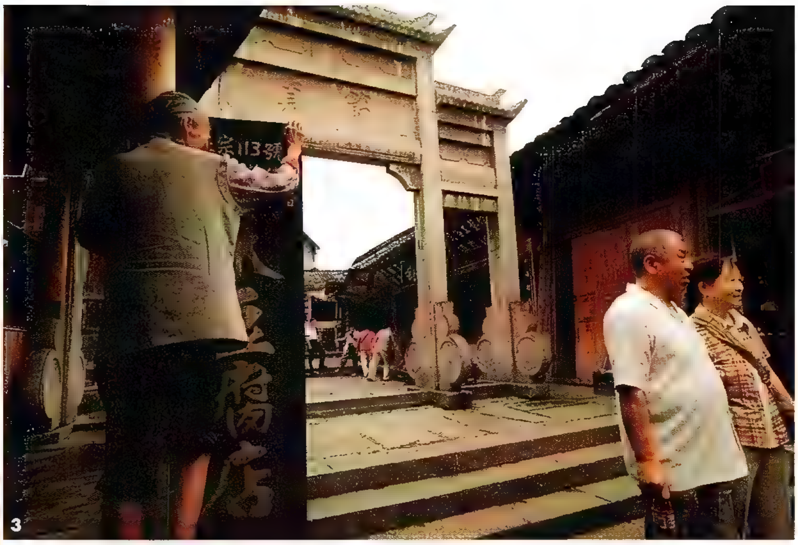
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After paying the 50 yuan admission fee, a local guide approached and insisted on offering his services. We asked if the tour was free. "No," he said, "five yuan per person."

I felt that because this place was all about natural scenery and not a cultural heritage site, it would be distracting to have someone next to me saying, "This rock is the fertility goddess pointing out the way, that one is an elephant's trunk..." So I turned him down. He repeated several times, "You'll get lost", then left.

His words came true not long after we entered the depths of the stone forests. Surrounded by the wondrous sight of red stones of every shape and size enhanced by the green trees, I snapped away as I walked along. The strange thing was, there were no signs at several key turns. Some had even toppled over, so it was quite easy to become disoriented. While I was trying to find my way, a woman farmer appeared and asked me if I needed a guide. "You'll never find the way out otherwise," she said.

I suddenly became suspicious: maybe certain villagers disturbed the signs on purpose then offered to help the lost? I refused her offer and tried to find my own way out, eventually succeeding. Later, I discovered that my friend Wang had got himself even more lost than I had, but he had run into two other photography fanatics who led him out. He admitted that he had started to panic and broke out in a sweat.

4

1

Dehang

Moonlight Murmurs

I liked Dehang from the moment I saw it.

Dehang is known for the Miao people and their art of drumming, which has become quite a tourist draw. The two daily performances include costumed dancers and a thrilling drum concert. A group of young Miao women and men dance and leap around a dozen or so drums, which they beat in a fury of energy and rhythm. At times they even jump on top of the drums, creating thunderous music from the rapid yet always harmonious drum beats. The most eye-catching performer was the fifth generation drum "king", a young woman who waved the drum sticks as if they were magic wands. They alternated between quick feather-light taps and powerful thumps in an entrancing display of drumming as a celebration of life.

The day we left Dehang, I took some photos at Tianwen Tai (Platform of Asking the Heavens). This spectacular sight is a solitary flat area high in the hills. Legend has it that poet and patriot Quyuan often questioned the heavens from this very spot.

Fenghuang

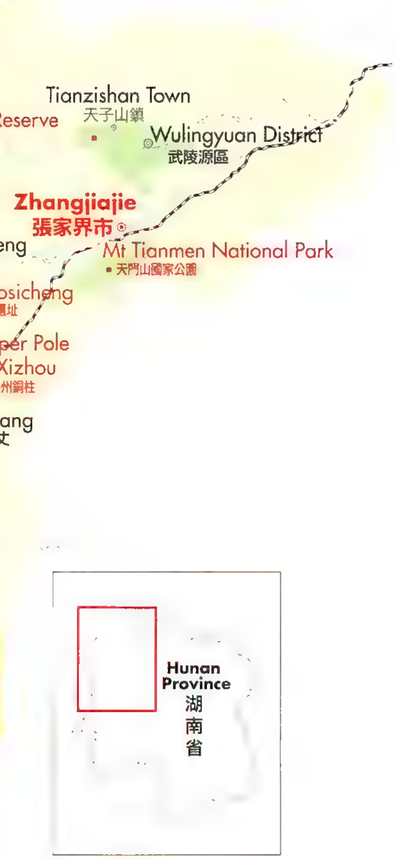
Between Commerce and Culture

Fenghuang ("phoenix" in Chinese) is famous mainly for its literary and artistic sons: writer Shen Congwen (1902—1988) and painter Huang Yongyu (1924—).

Years ago, the first visitors to Fenghuang tended to be culture vultures or history buffs. They followed the footsteps of the literary master Shen for a walk on the "official lane", or went in search of Cuicui and her grandfather - memorable characters from Shen's book Border Town. But the town itself has drifted as far from its sentimental origins as it is possible to get. Tourism in all its commercial excess was in full swing along the rivers and in the streets. Pop music blared out of karaoke halls and tourist touts shouted for business from their boats, shattering the former peace that had existed for centuries. I couldn't help feeling wistful, but then I thought, Fenghuang is truly a phoenix, re-

2

3


Tianzishan Town
天子山鎮
Mt Tianzi Nature Reserve
天子山自然保護區
Wulingyuan District
武陵源區
Zhangjiajie
張家界市
Laosicheng
老司城
Yongshun 永順
Mt Tianmen National Park
天門山國家公園
Ruins of Laosicheng
老司城遺址
Wangcun Town
王村鎮
Copper Pole in Xizhou
溪州銅柱
Guzhang
古丈
Dehang
德夯
Jishou
吉首市
Shanjiang Town
山江鎮
Machang
Qiliang Cave
奇梁洞
南方長城
Fenghuang
Huangsiqiao Ancient City
黃絲橋古城
Great Wall of the South
Hunan Province
湖
南
省

1. A thrilling drum concert in Dehang wins loud applause.

2. The 30-sq km Red Stone Forest emerged in the Cambrian age around 400 ~ 500 million years ago.

3. A romantic view of the Fenghuang ancient city at night.

4. Sending river lanterns drift on the water along with best wishes.

5. Streets in Fenghuang are never in want of tourists.

emerging into the open skies of commercialism - impossible to cage. Like it or not, that goes for almost all tourist attractions in China.

Sights and Sounds of Tuojiang

I stayed in Fenghuang for a few days. When the morning mist shrouds the Tuojiang River, early bird tourists are already leaping between the "jumping rocks". Running parallel is a stone bridge where, on one side, avid photographers have set up tripods to wait for the perfect light. On the other, women wash clothes and the photo stalls spread out their wares, providing warrior suits for tourists to pose in.

By no means does Fenghuang quiet down at night. The river glows in romantic anticipation: river lanterns stand ready to be set alight by tourists who will send them drifting on the water along with their wishes. On the river, small boats rock gently by the houses on stilts. The boat tariffs are discounted by this time. One popular spot is the pavilion bridge, lit up as if it were daytime and spilling over with merchandise and tourists of every persuasion, just like a busy fair. The bars are even more popular. Most are by the river and some are even on the embankment. One could be forgiven for becoming inebriated even without alcohol at the sight of silhouettes swaying in the soft light accompanied by seductive music drifting across the river.

Translated by Wang Zengfen

Travel Tips for **Zhangjiajie** and **Xiangxi**

Photos & Text • Huang Yanhong

Getting To Zhangjiajie

By air: There are direct flights to Zhangjiajie from 17 cities including Beijing, Chengdu, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Wuhan, Hong Kong. Daily flights depart from Changsha and Guangzhou.

By train: Beijing West station — Huaihua (No. 417) departs 9:40 am, arrives in Zhangjiajie the following afternoon at 3:40 pm; Guangzhou-Huaihua (No. 206 or 207) departs 11 am, arrives the following evening at 6 pm in Zhangjiajie.

By buses: Changsha and Zhangjiajie are linked by expressway, the drive is approximately 4 hours.

Tourist Sites in Zhangjiajie

Tianmen Mountain: Separate entry ticket, separate tour, has cable cars, needs half a day to one day.

Huangshizhai: The Wulingyuan all-in-one ticket is valid here, separate tour, has cable cars, needs half a day to one day

Upper Region of Wulingyuan: Jinbian Brook, Four Gates Circled By Water, Ten Mile Gallery etc, Wulingyuan all-in-one ticket is valid here, electric carts plus walking, needs one day

Lower Region of Wulingyuan: Yuanjiajie, Yangjiajie, Tianzi Mountain, top choice for photography fanatics, all-in-one ticket is valid here, electric carts and walking, needs two days or more

Baofeng Lake — Yellow Dragon Cave: Separate entry ticket, separate tour, needs half a day to one day

(Note: The upper and lower areas of Wulingyuan are linked by Bailong Elevator, Tianzi Mountain cable car as well as several hiking paths)

Suggested Itineraries Touring Zhangjiajie

Take your pick according to your timeframe from these examples:

Two-day Tour

Day 1: From Wulingyuan entrance, take the Tianzi Mountain cable car up the mountain, then ride electric cart to Yuanjiajie, walk down the mountain, walk along Jinbian Brook, exit via the Zhangjiajie ticket booth; stay downtown;

Day 2: Enter via the Zhangjiajie ticket booth, spend half a day at Huangshizhai, exit the gates and take the electric cart to the Four Gates Circled By Water entrance, then ride the electric cart to Five-Kilometre Gallery. Afterwards exit from Wulingyuan ticket booth.

Four-day Tour

Day 1: Start from Zhangjiajie entrance, spend half a day at Huangshizhai; visit Tianmen Mountain in the afternoon; stay in town;

Day 2: Enter Zhangjiajie, tour Jinbian Brook, take the Bailong Elevator to climb up the mountain in the afternoon, tour Yuanjiajie, stay overnight at Yuanjiajie;

Day 3: Tour Yangjiajie, Tianzi Mountain in the afternoon, stay on Tianzi Mountain;

Day 4: Go down the mountain and tour Ten Mile Gallery in the morning, exit from the Wulingyuan ticket booth in the afternoon, tour Baofeng Lake and Huanglong cave.

Photography in Zhangjiajie

Photo buffs often choose to stay longer; because the best sights of Wulingyuan are high on the mountain, so it's best to reserve a day for the off-mountain areas, dedicate more time on the mountains.

The environmentally-friendly carts within the national park are split into those for on and off the mountain, that's why it makes sense to stay in the park, for example, at the farmer residences on Tianzi Mountain, Yuanjiajie or Yangjiajie, this allows you to take the free electric carts on the mountain, which not only saves costs, but allows a faster response time when the ethereally beautiful sight of mountains encircled by fog appears.

1

Transportation in Zhangjiajie Scenic Area

Minibuses run from the ticket booth at Zhangjiajie to that at Wulingyuan (fare: 10 yuan); there are also minibuses from Zhangjiajie downtown to Wulingyuan entrance, fares are 8 yuan/ person; mini-buses service the route between downtown Zhangjiajie to Zhangjiajie park entrance, 8 yuan; there are mini-buses to the top of Tianzi Mountain from the Sinan Yu entrance, tickets cost 15 yuan, but take a long time because of the winding mountain paths; for intra-city transport, take the No. 2, 3, 7, or No. 1 bus from the train station to Tianmen Mountain (fare: 1 yuan)

Accommodation in Zhangjiajie

There are hotels like the four-star Xianglong international hotel, Zhangjiajie international hotel etc. Three-star hotels cost around 100 yuan per room; while normal hotel rooms cost about 50 yuan/ room;

- Tianzi Mountain Fengyun Hotel, which is the only one on the mountain, rates are around 300 yuan/ room; other lodgings are mostly farmers' homes on the mountains. Aside from Huangshizhai, these farmer home turned country-style inns abound at Yuanjiajie, Dingxin Rong village near Daguan Tai, Wulongzhai at Yangjiajie, opposite the Tianzi Mountain carpark, rooms usually cost 50 ~ 60 yuan. Below is a list of contact phone numbers for reference:

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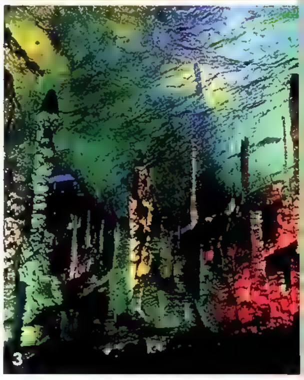
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1. Peaks and layers of mists form the legendary Zhangjiajie. (by Zhou Mingfa)

2. Station of the Bailong Elevator.

3. Yellow Dragon Cave. (by Zhou Mingfa)

4. Authentic farming dishes can be savoured at local families living beside the Grand View Terrace.

5. Chongtian Tower in the Tujia Customs Village.

6. Former residence of literati Shen Congwen in Fenghuang.

7. Musical performance at the Tujia Customs Village.

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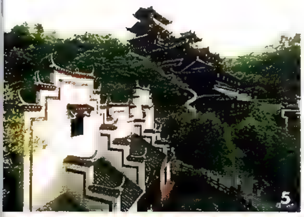
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Yuanjiajie Wangqiaotai Hotel Tel: 13789341901

Admissions in Zhangjiajie

■ Wulingyuan Scenic Area

Pass: 245 yuan (Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, Suoxi Valley, Tianzi Mountain, Yangjiajie), allows unlimited access within two days;

Baofeng Lake: 56 yuan; Dragon King Cave: 65 yuan; Tianmen Mountain: 258 yuan (includes cable car ride)

■ Cable cars

Tianzi Mountain cable car (ascending): 50 yuan; Tianzi Mountain cable car (descending): 42 yuan; Huangshizhai cable car (ascending): 48 yuan; Huangshizhai cable car (descending): 38 yuan; Bailong scenic elevator (ascending): 53 yuan; Shuirao Simen sight-seeing elevator (descending): 43 yuan; return tour of sight-seeing mini-train in Five-Kilometre Gallery: 30 yuan.

Special Tips for Touring Wulingyuan

Wulingyuan's entry tickets are valid for two days, there is a state-of-the-art fingerprint recognition system at the entrance, so tickets are not transferable, because of this, it's advisable to visit Huangshizhai on the first day, leave the park on the day; on the second day, visit Tianzi Mountain, Yangjiajie, even if there isn't enough time to see it, it's advisable to stay on the mountain overnight instead of leaving the park, otherwise you'll have to fork out more than 200 yuan on another ticket, no small amount.

Make full use of the free electric carts; but fees are charged for the elevators, cable cars, so it might be advisable to take them for only part of the journey, not only does this save money but also adds to the experience, most tourists choose to take the elevator or cable car to go up the mountain, then walk down to save time and energy.

Travel Tips for Tianmen Mountain

Tianmen Cave lies on the outskirts of Zhangjiajie and can be reached by bus. Tianmen Mountain has a separate admission price, visitors usually take the cable car to the top, then explore. On top of the mountain is a large piece of flat land, with trees and temples in a very beautiful setting, some avid photographers get to the other side for the most majestic shots of Tianmen Mountain.

Then, take the cable car and get off in the middle, change to a mini-bus for Tianmen Cave. After Tianmen Cave, take a mini-bus to go down the mountain.

Transportation in Xiangxi

■ Laosicheng

Each day there are 5, 6 services to and from Yongshun County, but they're not proper shuttles, just the farm vehicles that villagers use.

■ Wangcun

Several buses leave from Yongshun, the journey lasts one hour.

■ Red Stone Forest

Several buses leave from Wangcun, the journey lasts one hour.

■ Dehang

Take the night train from Changsha and arrive in Jishou the next morning, transfer to a bus at the train station square, the ride takes around 50 minutes.

■ Fenghuang

Fly to Zhangjiajie, then take a tourist bus to Fenghuang. There are two daily buses, one in the morning, another in the afternoon, it's a 5-hour journey; alternatively, take the train to Jishou, then take a tourist mini-bus to Fenghuang, these depart every 15 minutes, it's a 2-hour trip; mini-buses run between Fenghuang bus station and Qiliang Cave; Take a mini-bus (to Alaying direction) to Nan Changcheng Great Wall of the South) or Huangsi Qiao ancient city and get off at Nan Changcheng; take a mini-bus from Nan Changcheng to Alaying, then take a three-wheeler motorcycle to Huangsi Qiao ancient city; there are shuttles to Fenghuang to the Miao villages.

Accommodation in Xiangxi

■ Laosicheng

Lao Sicheng Resort Tel: 135 0843 3875; 40 yuan/ room;

■ Dehang

Country guesthouses like Nine Dragons Court charge around 30 ~ 60 yuan/ room;

■ Wangcun

Tianyuan Hotel Tel: 585 4598;

Mengdong River Hotel Tel: 585 3360;

■ Red Stone Forest

One can stay in Wangcun or Guzhang County.

■ Fenghuang

Tuojiang Riverside Inn, off-peak season 50 ~ 60 yuan/ room, extra 20 yuan for air-conditioning, the rates are twice or even triple the normal during the golden week periods. Here are some contacts for reference:

Kelan Qiju Family Inn Tel: 137 0743 6811;

Guanbo Lou Family Inn Tel: 131 3509 6308;

Xiaocheng Ju Inn Tel: 137 6214 6718;

Fenghuang Reservation Centre: (743) 322 9919, 613 5562.

Admissions in Xiangxi

■ Laosicheng: Free admission;

■ Dehang: 48 yuan; evening performance 120 yuan;

■ Wangcun: free admission;

■ Red Stone Forest: 50 yuan;

■ Fenghuang: Great Wall of the South: 45 yuan; Huangsi Qiao ancient city: 20 yuan; Qiliang Cave: 60 yuan; Fenghuang Historic Town Area (boating on the Tuojiang River, former residence of Shen Congwen, former residence of Xiong Xiling, ancestor hall of the Yang family, Dongmen city gate, Hongqiao Art Building) all-in-one pass: 98 yuan;

Villages like Duluo, Lao Dong, Chalong Dong, Shanjiang mostly charge admission of 68 yuan which includes a country style meal worth 8 yuan, the local tour groups charge 88 yuan (includes transport, admissions, country-style lunch).

7

Hard cover ~~HK$150~~ HK$120

Focus on Yunnan

The mountainous wonderland of Yunnan enjoys a favourable warm climate year round. Its capital, Kunming, sitting alongside Yunnan's largest lake, Dianchi, has the honourable name of "Spring City". The province is full of natural wonders and cultural relics, such as the Stone Forests, the Shangri-La, and the ancient cities of Dali and Lijiang. With over 20 diverse ethnic groups making up about one-third of the population, opportunities abound for you to see their characteristic cultures and customs.

滇
Focus on
Yunnan

Paperback ~~HK$95~~ HK$76
Hard cover ~~HK$150~~ HK$120

Focus on Fujian

Situated on the southeast coast, Fujian Province overlooks Taiwan Island across the Taiwan Strait. Its mountainous landscape includes the Wuyi Mountain Scenic Area, one of the UN World Heritage sites in China. The province's zigzag coastlines, numerous beaches and charming seas offer spectacular scenic beauty as well as historical and cultural interest in such places as the Drumming Wave Islet in Xiamen and the Mazu Temple in Meizhou Island.

閩
Focus on
Fujian

Paperback ~~HK$95~~ HK$76

Focus on Shanghai

Shanghai, the largest metropolis in China, and formerly the Far East financial centre, has experienced dramatic development over the past century. The world-famous Bund along the Huangpu River shows you buildings of different historical periods and varied architectural styles, while skyscrapers are rising in the new area of Pudong. Shanghai's multiculturism is seen in its music — operas, nostalgic jazz and discos — and in the busy commercial district of Nanjing and Huaihai roads.

滬
Focus on
Shanghai

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Focus on Shaanxi

Shaanxi is the cradle of the Chinese civilisation and Xi'an was the capital of 13 dynasties. This has left Shaanxi a rich legacy of historical sites and cultural relics. In the provincial capital Xi'an, there is the fascinating terracotta army unearthed from the tomb of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang; the tomb of Tang-dynasty Wu Zetian, China's first empress; and the stele forest. The province's beauty is capped with the sheer cliffs of Mount Huashan and the yellow earth of the Loess Plateau.

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Focus on Guangdong

An important gateway into China, the fertile Pearl River Delta of the southern province of Guangdong fans out from Guangzhou to the South China Sea and borders Hong Kong and Macao. The province's natural scenic spots include the limestone pinnacles of Zhaoqing's Seven Star Crags, the red sandstone of Danxia Mountain, and the volcanic beauty of Xiqiao Mountain. The capital, Guangzhou, offers plenty of history in its museums, temples, mosques and old colonial buildings.

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Focus on Guizhou

Guizhou is a land of splendid natural scenery. Its towering mountains and karst landforms team up with the gurgling rivers and magnificent waterfalls to form a wonderful work of Mother Nature. Huangguoshu Waterfalls and the limestone caves are the province's most frequented scenic spots. The 17 ethnic groups living in the picturesque province further colour the land with vivid customs and joyous festivals. It is its natural beauty and culture that make Guizhou a perfect travel destination.

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Focus on Tianjin

Tianjin, one of the four municipalities under direct Central Government administration, is an important industrial and commercial centre of China and the biggest port in the north. The history of the city can be found in its Ancient Culture Street, 100-year-old Western-style buildings, Opera Museum and Mazu Temple. Besides the TV Tower and the Haihe River in the city, there are scenic spots in the outskirts, including the Dule Temple and the Great Wall at Huangya Pass.

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Focus on Xinjiang

On the vast land of Xinjiang in Northwest China, there are mountains, basins, deserts and lakes, which provide tourists with numerous attractions — ruins of ancient cities and tombs along the Silk Road; Turpan, an oasis in the desert; Kanas Lake, a gem imbedded in the Altay Mountains; Bayanbulak — the Swan Lake; and the world's second largest desert, the Taklimakan. The minority ethnic groups living in Xinjiang, such as the Uygur, Kazak, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tajik, Xibe, Kirgiz and Tatar, all have their own unique colourful culture.

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Focus on Beijing

Beijing is a metropolis of everlasting charm. There are simply too many captivating things to see, to experience and to taste in this grand city with both old glamour and new mobility. There are historical sites such as the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City), the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and the Ming Tombs; there are also many scenic spots in its outskirts. Recently, tours have been organised for visitors to taste the real Beijing flavour of life — touring the small back lanes, having tea in a traditional-style teahouse and enjoying the Peking Opera.

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Focus on Shanxi

Shanxi Province, one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilisation, has impressive ancient architecture and a wealth of well-preserved Buddhist temples, monasteries and grottoes. Among the most famous are the Yungang Grottoes containing some of China's oldest sculptures and Buddhist art, the Yongle Palace, the Jinci Temple, the Hanging Monastery built on a sheer cliff and the Wutai Mountain, one of China's most famous sacred Buddhist lands.

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Focus on Guangxi

Unusual topography has endowed the province with numerous spectacular karst formations — limestone caves, pinnacles and rocks. The most famous and enchanting scenic spot is Guilin, and the most travelled route, on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. The coastal city of Beihai has the country's largest beach, the Silver Beach. Other attractions include the varied traditional customs of ethnic minorities, the Sino-Vietnamese border area, and the mysterious Huashan cliff paintings.

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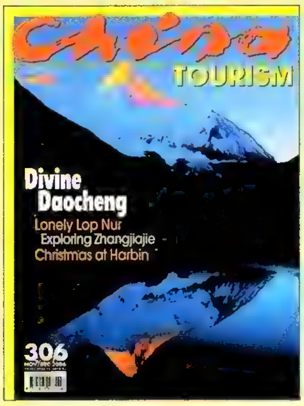

Readership Survey

China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Feature I: Divine Daocheng	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feature II: Legendary Zhangjiajie	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
On the Way:Luxurious Tours to Lijiang, Shangri-La	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discoveries: Four Years in a Mosuo Village	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Challenges: Lonely Lop Nur	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Excellent	**Good**	**Average**	**Fair**	**Poor**
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Cover	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

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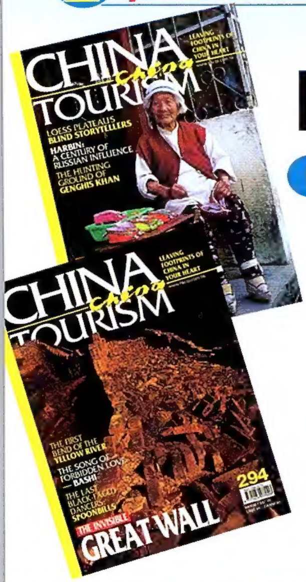

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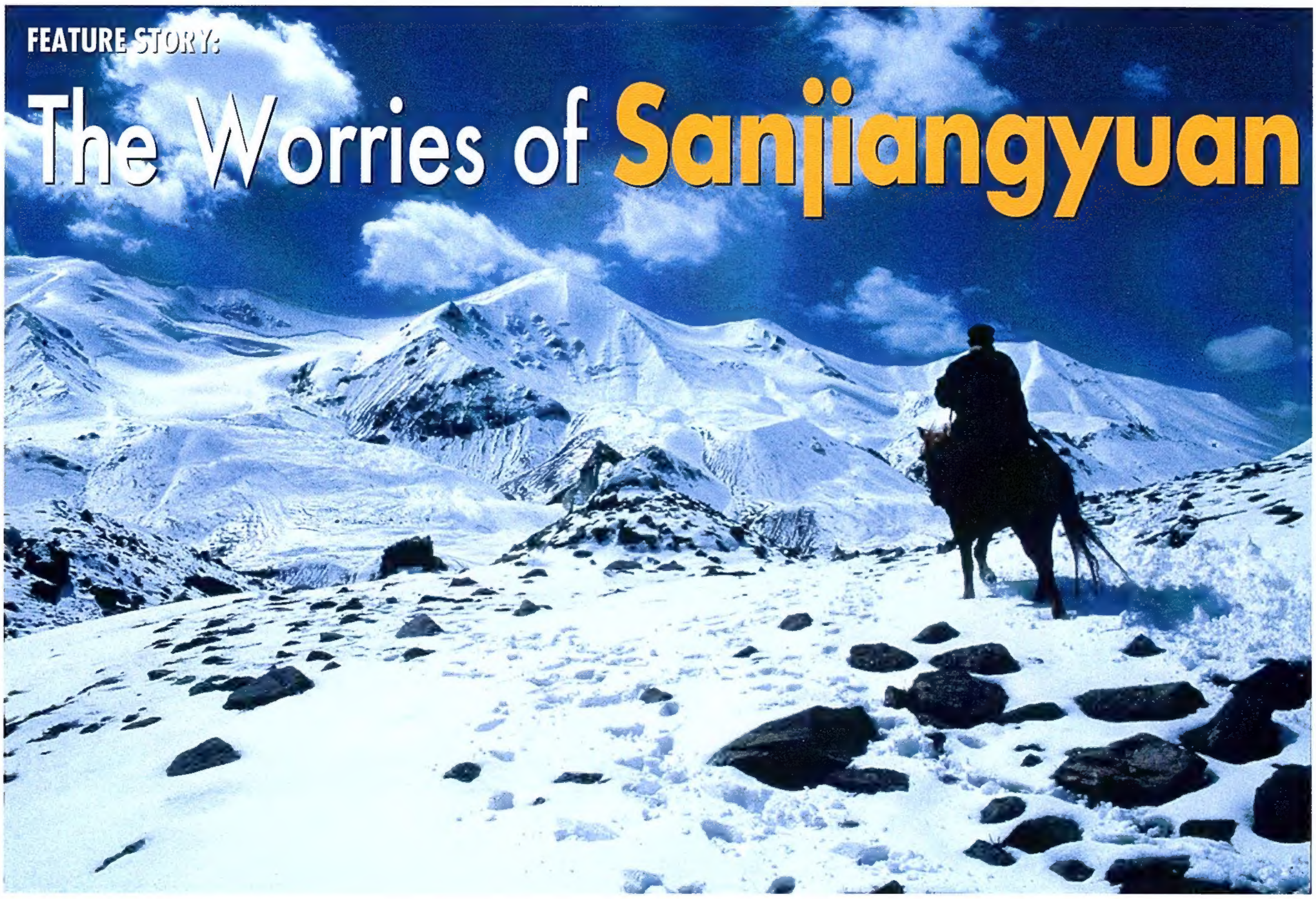
FEATURE STORY:

The Worries of Sanjiangyuan



Also known as "China's water tower", Sanjiangyuan, a Chinese term which indicates the springhead of three major rivers of China: Yangtze, Yellow River, and Lancang River, has its very beginning start in the hinterland of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. However, in these 20-more years, Sanjiangyuan has been unimaginably influenced by human activities: over-herding, unlimited gold digging, illegal hunting of wild animals... With photos taken within 20 years, our correspondent reports the beauty and sorrows of Sanjiangyuan.

On the Way:

Earthen Towers in Fujian

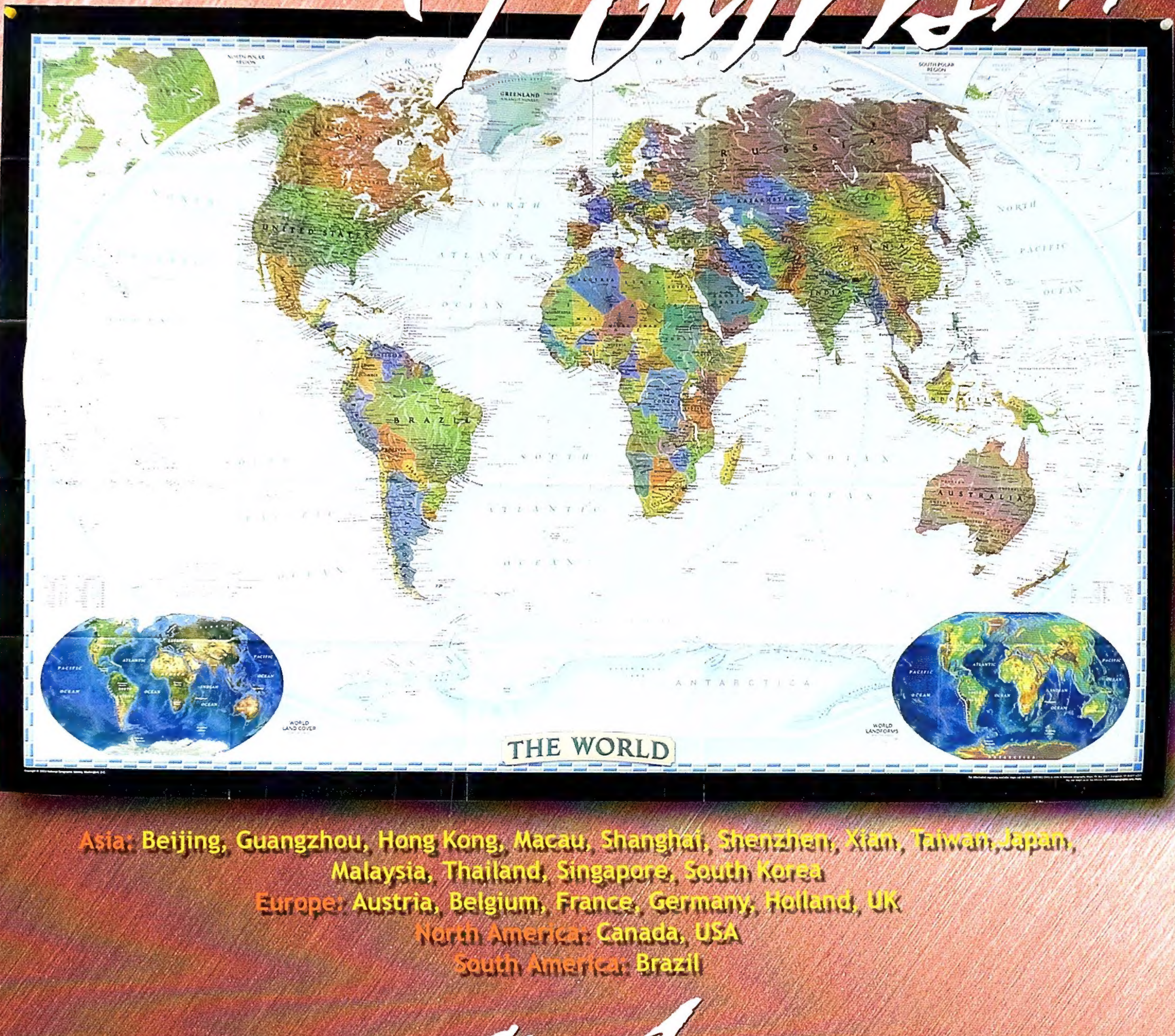
The Hakka in China is a family-oriented people. They built grand earthen towers for a few generations to live together. Today, there are some 20,000 earthen towers in the country. Just in the Yongding County in East China's Fujian Province, there are 360 round earthen towers and 4,000-more square earthen towers. It is no exaggeration that one may have to spend a year so as to visit all these characteristic buildings.

City Snaps:

Chengdu in Lento

Fed up by breath-taking countryside scenery of Sichuan Province? Why not just have a stroll in its capital city, Chengdu? Besides owning a rich history, modern Chengdu can also wow travellers with its local-produced beauties, exotic cafes, reading bars, and endless delicacies. Chengdu people follow their unique principle to enjoy life. No wonder the city is being voted as "the most happiest city in China".

China Tourism



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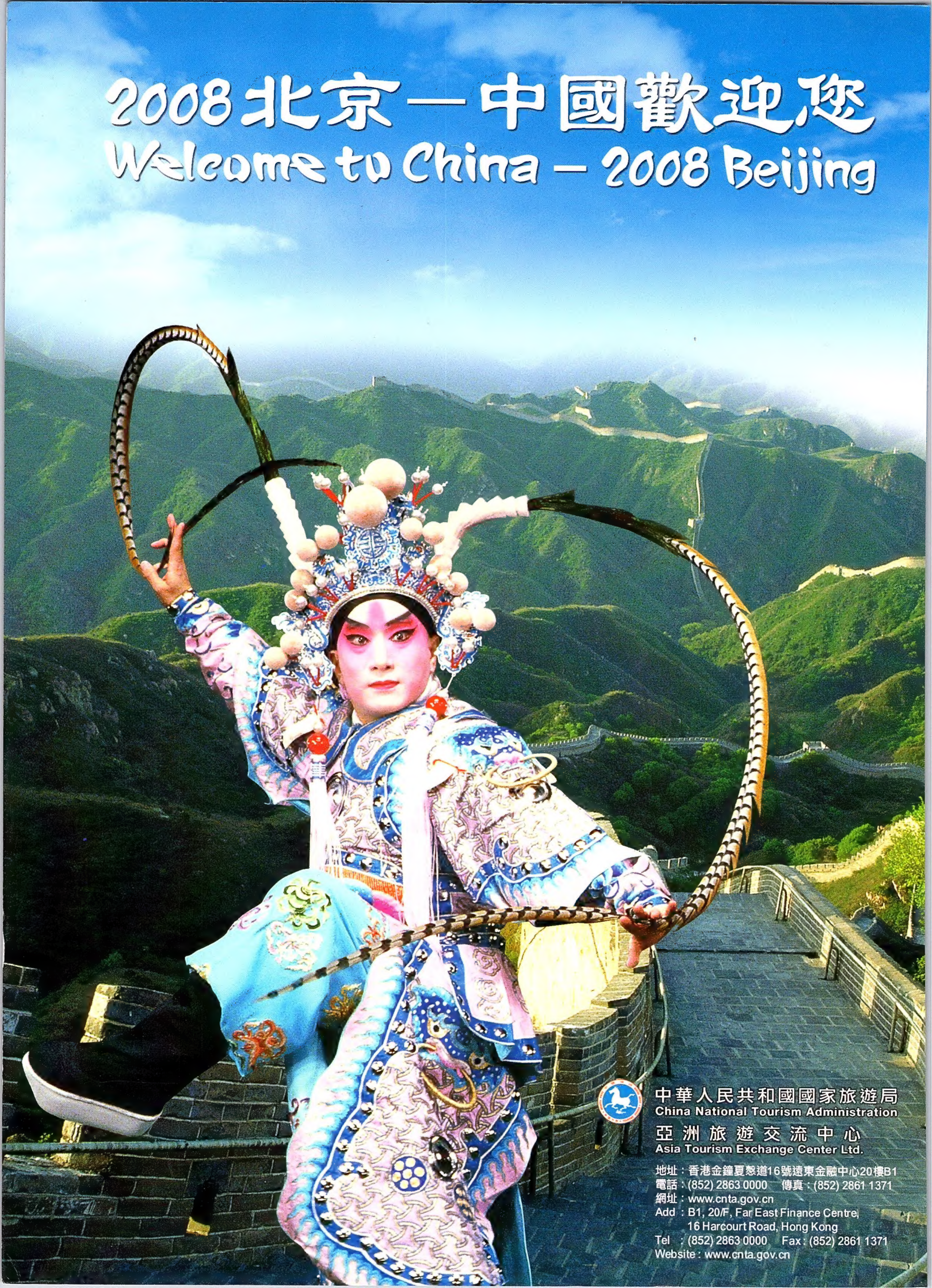
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